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# AN INTRODUCTION TO DRAMATIC THEORY

BY

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## PREFACE

**W**HILE in a work of this kind, dealing with the principles of tragedy and comedy, it was necessary to devote considerable space to the fundamental sources of comic and of tragic enjoyment, it must be pointed out that this book does not profess to present a new theory of laughter or a psychological analysis of the pleasure derived from tragedy. All through I have confined myself strictly to the theatre, and have endeavoured to analyse existing works of dramatic art rather than to probe back from these works to the more primitive sources of laughter and of tears. My aim has been to write an introduction to the study of drama, and for this purpose I have treated the dramatic productivity of Greece, Rome, France, Italy, Germany, and England as one, in an attempt to capture those essential characteristics by which all are linked together.

My apology for writing this book, if apology be needed, is that there is at present no satisfactory work on comedy as a type of drama, and that, even with tragedy, critics have been more inclined to analyse particular branches of the subject than to treat all as one. It has been my object here to show that there is something fundamentally in common not only between Æschylus and Shakespeare, but between Shakespeare and Ibsen; that the finest productions of modern, Elizabethan, and classical dramatic art are bound together by ties which, although less visible, count for far more than the apparent differences in style, in spirit, and in construction.

## INTRODUCTION TO DRAMATIC THEORY

Since the writing of this book two important studies related to my subject have been published, Dr J. S. Smart's essay on *Tragedy* (English Association Studies, vol. viii) and Mr J. Y. T. Greig's *The Psychology of Laughter and Comedy*. Both of these present a penetrating analysis and criticism of theories of dramatic art; and I am glad to be able to refer to them here, and occasionally in footnotes in the body of this volume, the more so because I find myself almost completely in accord with many of Dr Smart's views and because I have felt the clarity of thought and the observant philosophy of Mr Greig's volume.

As the book is intended to form an introduction to the study of dramatic art, I have appended two brief bibliographies, both designed rather to suggest some further reading on the part of students and amateurs of this subject than to provide anything in the shape of a complete list of critical or other volumes.

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# AN INTRODUCTION TO DRAMATIC THEORY

## I

### TRAGEDY AND COMEDY

#### (i) INTRODUCTORY

**D**RAMATIC theory is a subject which has occupied the minds of many of the most brilliant literary critics and philosophers from the very dawn of theatrical art in Greece to our present days. The drama is at once the most peculiar, the most elusive, and the most enthralling of all types of literature. It is so near to the deeper consciousness of the nation in which it takes its rise; it is capable of appealing so widely and so diversely to peoples of far distant ages and of varying climes; it is so intimately bound up with the theatre, the meeting-place of all classes of humanity; it is so social in its aims and in its objects; it is so prone to descend to the uttermost depths of buffoonery and of farce, and yet is so capable of rising to the most glorious heights of poetic inspiration, that it stands undoubtedly as the most interesting of all the literary products of the human intelligence.

ARISTOTLE AND THE GREEK DRAMA.—The fount of all true study of the essential elements of this type of literature lies, as is well known, in the *Poetics* of Aristotle. In the consideration of this work, so brilliant and so illuminating that it still stands as a recognized analysis of dramatic form, there are several facts which require careful examination. Aristotle was born in the year 384 B.C. He died at the

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age of sixty-two in 322 B.C. His *Poetics* presumably must have been planned and written about the year 330. By that year, 330 B.C., Athenian tragedy had risen to its fullest height and was already showing violent signs of that decay which appears inevitable in the growth and development of any species of literature. Æschylus (525-456 B.C.), apparently taking up the rudiments of tragedy left by Arion (c. 600 B.C.) and Phrynichus (fl. 511-472 B.C.), with a massive strength and a power over character hitherto undisplayed, laid the definite foundations of the Greek drama. In the year 499 he won the tragic prize, and thereafter contributed to the theatre some seventy plays, of which only seven are now extant.<sup>1</sup> His successor was Sophocles (495-406 B.C.), a figure more typically Greek, more mellowed and more harmoniously artistic. After Sophocles came Euripides (480-406 B.C.), more humanitarian, not so religious, bringing down tragedy from the heights that hitherto it had kept to the levels of ordinary human experience. Beauty was in all three, but after them this beauty perished. They were to be followed by none of their own type. Aristotle, therefore, writing in 330, had before him the very finest works of tragic inspiration which Greece could offer. A far different tale has to be told of comedy. Comedy was evidently of slower growth, and in the minds of the Athenians was relegated to an inferior position. It is usual to divide this comic effort of Greece into three divisions, styled 'old,' 'middle,' and 'new' respectively. The old comedy, which extended approximately from 470 to 390 B.C., saw its most prominent representative in Aristophanes (born c. 448 B.C.). It was largely political in character, and gave way to the social comedy of the middle period. The latest type of all, which might almost be styled a comedy of

<sup>1</sup> For list of plays and translations of Æschylus and of the other dramatists see the bibliography in Appendix II.

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manners,<sup>1</sup> developing most in the hands of Menander, did not come into being until about the year 320 B.C. It flourished until the middle of the third century B.C., and then, like tragedy, disappeared.

Aristotle, accordingly, was not fully capable of appreciating the dramatic work of Greece. The date at which he lived prevented him from realizing completely the worth and the possibilities of the comic spirit of his land. As a consequence, the *Poetics* deals most largely with tragedy and with the epic—the two types of literature which Greece had in his time developed finely—and hardly at all with comedy. It is obvious, therefore, that Aristotle's declarations regarding the nature of drama, even when confined and applied to the literature of his country, can never be looked upon as all-embracing and final.

It is also obvious that, regarded from a still broader standpoint, his judgments must often have a purely topical value. All through the ages till the late eighteenth century his statements were accepted as final and definite. Aristotle, it was believed, had laid down laws which were of universal application. The topical and temporary nature of his declarations was rarely, if ever, perceived. In practice, of course, men like Shakespeare utterly disregarded both his work and the works of his successors in criticism, but it was not till Dryden's time that a critic in theory could be found bold enough to suggest that perhaps Aristotle would have modified his views had he known of the modern developments in the art of drama; and even long after Dryden's time this suggestion, important as it appears to us to-day, was completely neglected.

In reading the *Poetics*, then, we must always remember that the author of that work lived in the fourth century B.C.,

<sup>1</sup> On the significance of this and other technical and semi-technical literary terms, see Section III of this book.

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that he could have had no idea of the glories of later romantic drama, and that even in the sphere of Athenian theatrical productivity he knew nothing of the later comedy of Menander. A still further warning must be given. The *Poetics*, as it has come down to us, is not a book of criticism, as is, let us say, the work of Arnold or of Meredith. Not only are there serious difficulties in the text itself, due possibly to corruption, but whole passages have been condemned as spurious. The possibility is that what we know as the *Poetics* is only part of a very much greater whole, possibly merely lecture notes of some pupil who had listened to the master in the περίπατοι, "the shady walks," of the Lyceum. Remembering this, we may be able to explain to ourselves why such large parts of this work deal with apparently trivial details. These details—of technique, of scenery, and of plot—might well fit into a large volume; in the work as we have it they loom up disproportionately large.

HORACE AND THE ROMAN DRAMA.—After Aristotle there is a long period of silence in dramatic criticism; and when it did arise once more it was destined, for centuries upon centuries, to remain based upon his judgments. In Horace (65–8 B.C.) we see the beginnings of what may be styled neo-classic literary theory. Aristotle's method had been largely analytic. He took play after play, dissected each, and finally gave his opinion as to the main characteristics of all. He laid down the law, it is true, but not in an aggressively didactic manner, and only after careful personal investigation into particular dramatic works. Horace's method is far different. His statements are utterly dogmatic, and, we feel, not often duly considered in the light of fact. In *The Epistle to the Pisos* we find his ideas in their most succinct form. The types of poetry there have been definitely settled; a special metre, it is determined, is appropriate to each. Characters in dramas

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and in poems alike must be types. There must not be brought "on to the stage what ought to be done behind the scenes"; a play must not "be longer or shorter than five acts"; only three speaking persons must be on the stage at one time; above all, "Let the Greek patterns be never out of our hands by night or day."

Everything is cut and dried; there is little scope for any originality save the originality of new wording. Possibly because of this, Rome did not see so great a drama as did Greece. Of the Roman drama, however, it is exceedingly difficult to judge. Out of the entire works of the trio of once famous playwrights, Ennius (239-169 B.C.), Pacuvius (220-130 B.C.), and Accius (170-86 B.C.), only a few fragments have come down to us, Seneca's ten tragedies alone surviving the shipwreck of Latin serious drama. Plautus (*d.* 184 B.C.) and Terence (*c.* 185-159 B.C.), certainly, wrote then their comedies, but comedy was considered by the critics, again possibly following Aristotle's lead, as a lower species of literary composition.

MEDIEVAL AND NEO-CLASSIC CRITICISM.—In the Middle Ages the old drama practically vanished. It was present, no doubt, on the Continent as here in debased forms, but even record of it is very scanty. At this period, on the other hand, a new drama, arising not out of pagan ceremonial but out of the services of the Church, was born. Gradually, step by step, from mere two- or three-line *tropes*<sup>1</sup> it grew, until in the fourteenth century it appeared in the form of the vast cycles of the mystery plays. This drama, however, was purely of the people; it was unliterary, and with it went no new criticism. By the fourteenth century in Italy the Renaissance, the rebirth of

<sup>1</sup> *Tropes* were the additions made to the regular services of the Church, leading on the one hand to the development of hymns, and on the other to the rise of primitive dramatic form.

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enthusiasm for things classical, was well on its way, and once more dramatic theory revived, but it was dramatic theory divorced from the typically medieval drama, being based almost entirely on Horace. "Follow the ancients," was the general cry; "Don't try novelty"; "Keep to your five acts"; "Imitate Seneca"; above all, "Keep to the unities." These rules of the neo-classicists, to be discussed in greater detail hereafter, were to be the skeletons in the cupboards of dramatic critics and of dramatists for centuries to come. The dead bones of Horace dominated and made timorous even the contemporaries of Shakespeare. Charming as Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* is, it is wholly under the sway of this artificial theory. Sidney condemns tragi-comedy, which was to be one of the glories of Elizabethan drama; he condemns all those writers who, like Shakespeare, indulged in romantic excess. He speaks of "our Tragedies, and Comedies (not without cause cried out against,) observing rules, neyther of honest civilitie, nor of skilfull Poetrie, excepting *Gorboduck*"—*Gorboduc*, one of the dullest and the most monotonous of mid-sixteenth-century dramatic productions. After Sidney came Jonson, who tried to put into practice what both he and Sidney preached in theory. Jonson's criticism is fragmentary, being contained mainly in his little volume called *Discoveries*, but his neo-classic tendencies can be seen clearly in his two tragedies, *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, obviously written in direct opposition to the romantic plays of Shakespeare. So followed many another critic and dramatist. In the late seventeenth century came Rymer, arch-priest of neo-classicism. In *The Tragedies of the Last Age Considered* (1678) and *A Short View of Tragedy* (1692-93) he shows us this particular type of criticism carried to a *reductio ad absurdum*. Iago for Rymer is impossible. Why? Because it is a recognized fact that *all* soldiers are honest,



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and because it is also recognized that *all* human beings should show gratitude to those who are good to them. This is simply Horace's doctrine of types, suggested by the art of Greece, run to excess.

Dryden, as we have seen, broke away. His famous *Essay of Dramatick Poesie*, published in 1668, presents in dialogue form the struggle between those neo-classicists who looked to France for inspiration and those freer critics who could appreciate Shakespeare. The *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* is a work which, like Aristotle's *Poetics*, should be read by all who would study not only the development of literary criticism, but the essentials of the art of the drama. Dryden's critical remarks are, it is true, not confined to this work. One of his most penetrating statements, indeed, appears only as a manuscript note in a copy of Rymer's work. "It is not enough," he says there, "that Aristotle has said so, for Aristotle drew his models of tragedy from Sophocles and Euripides: and, if he had seen ours, might have changed his mind."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* contains the brief abstract of all that Dryden held most sure in regard to the theory of drama.

Dryden's majestic independence, however, was not to be followed up for many years. Addison was an enlightened, but not a great, critic. His judgments are essentially 'safe' from the Augustan point of view. All through the eighteenth century the rules of the neo-classic creed were followed by writer after writer, inconsistencies arising because, although Shakespeare had broken every one of those rules, every critic nevertheless felt him to be a great writer. It did not dawn upon anyone in that age, except Dr Johnson, and in his case but dimly, that Shakespeare,

<sup>1</sup> On these manuscript notes see the Scott-Saintsbury *Dryden*, xv, 379; and Saintsbury's *Loci Critici*, pp. 157-8.

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because he broke rules, might be pointing out a newer and truer way for literature.

ROMANTIC CRITICISM.—In Johnson's time, although he himself was the last great exponent of the neo-classic ideals, signs of a change were visible. Already the precursors of romanticism, in theory and in practice, had come into being. Gray was writing his *Odes*, Collins was indulging in reveries on the theme of Gaelic romance; Chatterton, Mrs Radcliffe, and a host of others, geniuses and charlatans, were tentatively feeling their way toward a new poetry and a new prose. Corresponding to this fresh creative movement came the rise of romantic criticism. Hurd, the Wartons, and others were striving to display to men the beauties of the long-despised Middle Ages. The drama, however, lay somewhat apart. In the late eighteenth century the theatres were not in a flourishing condition. Sentimentalism ruled comedy; the tragic dramatists could not free themselves from the rigid fetters of classicism, and when they did so in the nineteenth century they swept into the inanities of ultra-romantic melodrama. Managers of the theatres found that 'show' was more paying than regular plays; the spectators were eager to welcome all kinds of spectacles. Accordingly, we find that for years, even in the very midst of the full romantic movement, drama was largely neglected by critics and by poets alike. Many of the poetic dramas of the early nineteenth century were 'closet' dramas, like Byron's *Werner*, neither intended, "nor in any shape adapted, for the stage." Renewed study of Shakespeare, however, and of Shakespeare's contemporaries, along with a renewed appreciation of the true glories of Greek literature, gave rise to a reconsideration of the great masterpieces of the past. Coleridge led the way, developing an entirely new type of critical analysis in his lectures and in his *Notes on Shakespeare*. Hazlitt at  
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the same time strove to investigate the manifestations of the comic spirit as expressed by Shakespeare, the Restoration dramatists, and the novel-writers of the eighteenth century. It is this type of criticism which, with modifications, has endured to the present day. Its achievements were remarkable, but it possessed one or two characteristics in the early period of its development which prevented it from reaching a final conclusion. In the first place, it was largely *subjective*, dependent upon the tastes and upon the caprices of the several critics. Because of this, it neglected to a great extent a detailed investigation into the circumstances which surrounded the great works of dramatic art produced during the different periods of theatrical history. These circumstances, often of prime importance for an understanding of particular dramas, have been fully appreciated only in recent times.

The criticism of modern days has been exceedingly diverse, and has often penetrated farther than any of the preceding literary theory. New knowledge of psychology has aided men in obtaining a more catholic view of literature, and detailed research has opened up fields of study which before were entirely unknown. As the majority of the most important of the works devoted to the subject of drama are referred to not only in the text of the later chapters of this book, but also in the bibliographical appendix, there is no necessity to enumerate them here. All that may be done at this point is to indicate what appears to be a weakness in most of these critical volumes. This weakness lies in the want of a more comprehensive view of the whole of dramatic art. On the diverse manifestations of the theatre, from high tragedy and fine comedy on the one hand to the most pitiful of melodrama and farce on the other, even on that distant cousin of Thalia and Melpomene, the marionette and the puppet show, have been written volumes

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innumerable. Brilliant studies have been made of Æschylus and Seneca, of Shakespeare and Molière, but only too often the difficulties inherent in this subject have prevented a true analysis of the qualities shared alike by Shakespeare and Æschylus, by Molière and Aristophanes.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF DRAMATIC THEORY.—These difficulties, as must have been evident even from the brief account of the historical development of dramatic theory given above, are truly enormous. The drama is not a part of literature alone. It is always dependent on the theatre. In considering any piece of dramatic art not only must a picture of the particular theatre in which it was first produced and for which it was originally written be continually present in our minds, but we must even attempt to visualize in some vague manner the actors who played the parts. In studying *Hamlet* we must place ourselves in imagination in the Globe playhouse and create for ourselves an image of the Elizabethan actor Burbage. In studying *Venice Preserv'd* we must enter Wren's Theatre Royal in Drury Lane and witness there the actress for whom Otway undoubtedly created his chief female part, the incomparable Mrs Barry. Apart from this, too, the audience must be remembered. The drama stands away from pure poetry in that it is primarily an art-form that makes its appeal to a precise and often limited body of spectators. A poet like Blake may, in seclusion, produce his prophetic rhapsodies independently of his public; he may write more for the readers yet unborn than for the readers of his time; but the dramatist must always bear in mind the audience before whom he is to present his work. This dependence of the dramatist on the public necessarily leads toward the confusion of diverse forces. The temporary and the topical will mingle in his work with the permanent and the eternal. *Hamlet* will give his advice to the players and rail at the

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child-actors at the very time that he is engaged in a soul-struggle which proves his kinship with the tragic heroes of past ages and of the future. The dependence of the dramatist on the theatre, on the actors, and on the audience, we may place as the first difficulty in any endeavour to analyse the qualities common to all the great dramatists of the world.

The theatre also is partly responsible for the second great difficulty—the sharp line of demarcation between the classic and the romantic dramas. These are the two main divisions of tragic effort dealt with by Professor Vaughan in his admirable work on *Types of Tragic Drama*; and undoubtedly the plays of ancient Greece, with their descendants, the plays of Racine, Voltaire, and Alfieri, present to our view qualities entirely alien to the characteristics of the Elizabethan, Spanish, and German dramas. Sometimes, it must be felt, there is nothing in common between Shakespeare and Sophocles, so startlingly different are the technique and the expression of those two dramatists. The very conception of the tragic spirit differs so entirely in these two men that almost nothing might appear to unite them save the mere fact that both wrote in dialogue works to be presented before an audience. This difficulty, one of paramount importance, we shall consider in greater detail later.

Not only, however, is there this line of demarcation between the typical drama of Greece, France, and Italy and the drama of England, Spain, and Germany; there is also a striking variety of types, both of tragedy and of comedy, within the bounds of the dramatic productivity of any one nation. England may be taken as an example. What, we may well ask ourselves, is there truly in common between *Arden of Feversham* or Moore's *Gamester* and the romantic tragi-comedies of Beaumont and Fletcher? How can Shakespeare's dramas share in any way the spirit of Dryden's

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*Conquest of Granada*? What relation is there between Steele's *Conscious Lovers* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Or between Jonson's *Volpone* and Congreve's *The Way of the World*? It would almost appear as if the only method of treating these types would be to consider them either purely from the historical point of view or else purely from the point of view of each apparently independent species. It is this difficulty of discerning the qualities common to the various types that has led to so many 'Chronologies' of English drama and to the numerous specialized works on the separate divisions of tragedy and of comedy.

Finally, there is a difficulty which lies apart from those noted above—the fact that drama more than poetry requires a psychological analysis. A study of the characteristics common to Æschylus and Shakespeare, to Terence and Molière, will take us deep to the roots of the human emotions. The play-acting spirit is one that rises out of the most primitive forms of human society. The question of what constitutes our pleasure in witnessing a tragedy demands a knowledge of half-savage emotions, while the study of the sources of the comic leads us toward an investigation into the causes that produce laughter of the crudest and most elemental form. It may appear strange to connect a savage dancing, intoxicated with his own emotion, over the palpitating body of a newly slain foe, with a *bon mot* of Mirabel; but the connexion between the two is readily demonstrable, and perhaps we may not be able to diagnose aright the spirit of that *bon mot* before we have analysed the crude emotions of the savage.<sup>1</sup>

Other difficulties, obviously, there are in any consideration of an art-type such as this; but they are difficulties surmountable. We shall not, however, be able to proceed

<sup>1</sup> On the manifestations of laughter in primitive races see J. Sully, *An Essay on Laughter*.

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far if we do not always bear in mind at least these chief problems that lie in our path. There must be no attempt to slur them over. A result will be attained not by overlooking the difficulties, but by appreciating to the full their importance and by passing beyond their boundaries. It is not by ignoring the presence of the audience in Greece, in Elizabethan England, or in the England of the Restoration that we shall be able in some way or another to connect the *Œdipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles, the *Hamlet* of Shakespeare and the *Aureng-Zebe* of Dryden, but by an appreciation of the fundamentally differing characteristics of those three audiences, and by a consequent discounting of the purely local and temporary elements called forth in the respective dramas by those three separate bodies of spectators.

### (ii) THE RELATIONS OF TRAGEDY AND COMEDY

THE AFFINITY OF TRAGEDY AND COMEDY.—At the beginning of an investigation such as this it must be noted that tragedy and comedy are not dissimilar, and not so fundamentally opposed to one another that they can be treated only in isolation. There is, in point of fact, more in common between high tragedy and fine comedy than there is between certain types of tragedy or between certain types of comedy. In Greece and in England alike, tragedy and comedy both took their rise not only at approximately the same time, but out of the same forms. In Greece the choral song chanted round the altar of the god developed along the twin lines of tragic and of comic or satirical expression. The services of the Church, out of which sprang the collective mysteries of the Middle Ages, gave rise both to the tragic themes of Abraham and Isaac and to the comic interludes of Mak and the shepherds. Plato, treating the subject in a more or less abstract manner, discerned in his *Philebus*

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both pleasurable and painful elements in all laughter; and modern investigators have shown clearly how closely allied are the two moods or *Les Passions de l'Âme*, to employ the title of that book of Descartes wherein the relations between sadness and laughter are subtly discussed. In the flourishing period of Greek tragedy comedy was allowed to enter in, perhaps not so freely as in Shakespeare, but at any rate consciously and of set purpose.<sup>1</sup> Many are the individual writers who have excelled in the two great branches of drama. In England Shakespeare wrote his *As You Like It* as well as *Hamlet*, Jonson his *Every Man in his Humour* as well as *Sejanus* and *Catiline*. Again, the same nations have produced both species contemporaneously. In France Racine framed his brilliant neo-classic tragedies while Molière was penning and acting his sparkling comedies. In Italy Goldoni flourished, if not contemporaneously with, at least in the same age as, the finest tragic dramatist of that land, Vittorio Alfieri.

The fact is that tears and laughter lie in close proximity. It is but a step from the one to the other. "The motor centres engaged," remarks Sully, "when in the full swing of one mode of action, may readily pass to the other and partially similar action."<sup>2</sup> We feel nothing incongruous in practice in laughing at the jests of Mercutio and at the same time witnessing the tragic story of "Juliet and her Romeo," just as we feel nothing incongruous when in a novel of Dickens we pass from hilarious laughter to the most tearful forms of the pathetic. In all essentially creative ages the two have been freely used together in every kind of literary art. The Greek dramatists, as we have seen, did not confine them to watertight compartments: the Elizabethans

<sup>1</sup> Thus, Æschylus permitted the Herald to enter into his *Suppliants* and the Nurse into his *Choephoraë*, while the *Antigone* of Sophocles has its Watchman and the *Orestes* of Euripides its Phrygian Slave.

<sup>2</sup> J. Sully, *An Essay on Laughter* (1902), p. 70.



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freely mingled them. The doctrine that the two are fundamentally opposed is largely the development of later criticism—not so much of ‘free’ criticism, as exemplified in Aristotle and in the romantics, as of ‘derivative’ and ‘artificial’ criticism, as exemplified in Horace and the neo-classic writers of France and of eighteenth-century England. It is noticeable that wherever a critic of the neo-classic school breaks away into a more independent or natural position there vanishes from him the necessity for any strict division between the two moods or species. Dryden stands in such a position : the leader of the rising school of restraint and of intellectualism, he yet preserves an independence which owes something to his ties of kinship with the authors of the early seventeenth century. He says, in the person of Neander : <sup>1</sup>

A continued Gravity keeps the Spirit too much bent ; we must refresh it sometimes, as we bait in a Journey, that we may go on with greater ease. A Scene of Mirth mix'd with Tragedy, has the same effect upon us which our Musick has betwixt the Acts, which we find a Relief to us from the best Plots and Language of the Stage, if the Discourses have been long. I must therefore have stronger Arguments ere I am convinc'd, that Compassion and Mirth in the same Subject destroy each other, and in the mean time, cannot but conclude, to the Honour of our Nation, that we have invented, increas'd, and perfected a more pleasant way of writing for the Stage, than was ever known to the Ancients or Moderns of any Nation, which is Tragi-Comedy.

And this leads me to wonder why *Lisideius* and many others should cry up the Barrenness of the *French* Plots, above the Variety and Copiousness of the *English*. Their Plots are single, they carry on one Design which is push'd forward by all the Actors, every Scene in the Play contributing and moving towards it : Our Plays, besides the main Design, have Under-Plots, or By-Concernments, of less considerable Persons, and Intrigues, which are

<sup>1</sup> *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie.*

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carried on with the Motion of the main Plot : As they say the Orb of the fix'd Stars, and those of the Planets, though they have Motions of their own, are whirl'd about by the Motion of the *primum mobile*, in which they are contain'd : That Similitude expresses much of the *English Stage* : For if contrary Motions may be found in Nature to agree ; if a Planet can go *East* and *West* at the same time ; one way by Virtue of his own Motion, the other by the force of the first Mover ; it will not be difficult to imagine how the Under-Plot, which is only different, not contrary to the great Design, may naturally be conducted along with it.

Dryden, however, does not stand alone. If he was the "first mover" of the neo-classic school Dr Johnson was, a century later, the very high priest and dictator of the Augustans, yet with a retained naturalness and a lack of mental servitude which is seen nowhere more clearly than in his famous pronouncement on this precise theme.

I know not whether he that professes to regard no other laws than those of nature, will not be inclined to receive tragi-comedy to his protection, whom, however generally condemned, her own laurels have hitherto shaded from the fulminations of criticism. For what is there in the mingled drama which impartial reason can condemn ? The connexion of important with trivial incidents, since it is not only common but perpetual in the world, may surely be allowed upon the stage, which pretends only to be the mirror of life. The impropriety of suppressing passions before we have raised them to the intended agitation, and of diverting the expectation from an event which we keep suspended only to raise it, may be speciously urged. But will not experience show this objection to be rather subtle than just ? Is it not certain that the tragick and comick affections have been moved alternately with equal force, and that no plays have oftener filled the eye with tears, and the breast with palpitation, than those which are variegated with interludes of mirth ?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Rambler*, No. 156.



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THE RELATIONS BETWEEN TYPES OF TRAGEDY AND OF COMEDY.—The decisions of Dryden and Johnson, compared and contrasted with the decisions of others of their own and of different schools, show clearly enough the secret that underlies this problem of tragi-comedy. While, however, we may recognize that the more natural the age, the more will comedy and tragedy be mingled, and that the more natural and independent the critic, the more will he find the kinship of these two apparently diverse types, there are two facts which must here be noted and borne in mind. The first is, that there are certain types of tragedy which seem to have an emotional affinity to corresponding types of comedy. A realization of this is expressed by Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry*. "The modern practice," he says, contrasting the ancient stage with the Elizabethan, "of blending comedy with tragedy, though liable to great abuse in point of practice, is undoubtedly an extension of the dramatic circle; but the comedy should be as in *King Lear*, universal, ideal, and sublime." If we imagine *King Lear* with the Fool cut away and his place taken by a set of characters such as appear in *The Taming of the Shrew* we shall, I think, realize the peculiar affinity that exists between the tragic spirit of *Lear* and the comic spirit of the jester. On the other hand, we could not imagine a satisfactory union of the peculiar comedy of *Lear's* fool and, let us say, the heroic drama of the Restoration. That heroic drama, strangely enough, finds its comic affinity in the sphere of manners. Dryden has written plays, such as *Secret Love, or, The Maiden Queen*, where something of the heroic note is struck in some scenes, something of the manners note in others; and the two seem well to harmonize. Etherege, the real founder of the true manners style, presented in his first play, *The Comical Revenge, or, Love in a Tub*, a tragi-comedy where rimed heroic scenes alternated with pure

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Restoration comedy. The reason of the harmony may be discovered probably in the fact that both are artificial. The heroism of the Drawcansir serious dramas is as removed from the physical realities of life as is the airy dallying of the comic muse of Congreve. It is the artificiality which forms the link between the two.<sup>1</sup>

Passing still farther, we may find a bond of union between the comic parts of the sentimental drama of the eighteenth century and the domestic drama of the same age. The domestic drama depends upon reality. How true a picture it may be of actual life will, of course, rest with the particular genius of the dramatist, but it will never seek to enter either the realms of the Shakespearian tragedy or the dominion of the artificial heroic species. The romantic comedy of Shakespeare, therefore, unless considerably altered, would hardly harmonize with its spirit, and still further the comedy of manners would be wholly alien to its outlook and aim. The comedy that is associated with the sentimental *genre*, however, also makes an appeal to reality. It may be often a spurious form of comedy, but that is not of importance here. What is of importance is that it is able to go along with the domestic tragedy without producing that clash of two spirits which is noticeable in some transition plays—the plays that come between the Elizabethan and the Caroline periods, and those between the eras of Restoration wit and of eighteenth-century sentimentalism.

This, then, is a point we are bound to note in all attempts to relate in any way the spirits of tragedy and of comedy—the correspondence of certain types of tragic and of comic expression. There is, besides, a species of converse truth

<sup>1</sup> This artificiality, of course, depends largely upon intellectual qualities. The wit of the comedy of manners and the rhetoric of the heroic tragedy are thus bound together by the common tie of rational as opposed to emotional creation.

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which is no less observable. Not only are certain types of comedy unsuited for certain types of tragedy, but, as will be perfectly apparent, tragedy and comedy can both develop along separate lines so as to become, in an extreme form, fundamentally opposed. Thus, for example, a violently cynical spirit will effectually extinguish even the possibility of a certain type of tragic expression. Let us take *Othello*. If *Othello* is to be appreciated aright an atmosphere, a mood, must be created in the mind fitted for the reception of the tragic spirit of the play. Let but one thought of cynicism as regards the development of the plot enter in, and the whole effect will be lost. Rymer thus found it impossible to appreciate this tragedy, partly no doubt because of neo-classic prejudice, but mainly because he was not prepared to accept certain axioms which Shakespeare had laid down. Cynicism, on the other hand, is not inimical to the heroic tragedy, precisely because that heroic tragedy is far beyond the reach of cynicism. Men of the Restoration age might laugh at honour, cynically jeer at love, but they could appreciate in their own way the Love and Honour dramas. Farce, for a different reason, is alien to almost all forms of tragedy. There could be no purely farcical under-plot in either a Shakespearian or a Restoration tragedy. Dryden could take *Troilus and Cressida*, heroicize the characters of the lover and his mistress, creating thereby a truly tragic conclusion, and at the same time make cynical the figure of Pandarus; but he could not have introduced in the midst of his serious scenes the slightest element of farce without irretrievably ruining his drama. In working along the two lines of heroics and of cynicism he realized their affinity; farce he kept for his purely comic inventions.

If we bear in mind these distinctions, remembering on the one hand the intimate relations that exist between tragedy and comedy, and on the other the fact that comedy

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can so develop as to preclude any idea of harmonious juxtaposition with tragedy or with certain types of tragedy, we may find it possible to analyse, or to present suggestions for an analysis of, those characteristics which tragedy and comedy appear to have in common. For this purpose it will be best, as far as is possible, to confine our attention, in this preliminary inquiry at least, to the more aristocratic realms of the dramatic muse, dealing principally with what we may call high tragedy and fine comedy. A slight glance at the signification of these terms may fitly follow here.

### (iii) THE FABLE <sup>1</sup> (PLOT)

FARCE AND MELODRAMA.—High tragedy may be appropriately opposed to melodrama, although there are other types of serious drama, as we shall find, which cannot be included along with the plays of Æschylus and of Shakespeare, and yet possess no elements which could possibly be styled melodramatic: fine comedy may as appropriately be opposed to farce. Concrete instances will make the position clear. We call Brandon Thomas's *Charley's Aunt* a farce: we call Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* a melodrama. What are our reasons for thus labelling those two? In the first place, there is to be noted the use of the words farce and melodrama, so that we may not be misled by ancient or popular associations. Farce, according to the etymologists, is a word derived ultimately from the Latin *farcio*, 'I stuff,' so that farce means the type of drama 'stuffed with low humour and extravagant wit.'<sup>2</sup> The word came into frequent use in England only toward the end of the seventeenth

<sup>1</sup> Fable is the regular word used in neo-classic criticism for the plot as opposed to the characters of the play. The distinction is to be traced back to Aristotle.

<sup>2</sup> The development of meaning in this word, from the world of physical things to the realm of theology and thence to the theatre, may be fully studied in the *Oxford Dictionary*.

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century, and was then and thereafter employed not always in a strict and circumscribed sense. There was a certain degenerating movement in comedy which started from about the year 1675, and the tastes of the audience ever more and more drew the dramatists to introduce weaker and frailer types of humorous drama. A fashion sprang up for three-act plays. These three-act plays were generally not so witty or so brilliant as the fuller five-act dramas of the more regular authors; but the word farce was applied to them solely in contradistinction to the richer and more extended comedies of the time. Farce, then, came to mean simply a short humorous play. As, however, in a short play there is usually no time or opportunity for the broader display of character and of plot, farces came rapidly to deal only with exaggerated, and hence often impossible, comic incidents with frequent resort to mere horseplay. With this signification the word has endured to modern times. Melodrama has a somewhat similar development of meaning. Derived from the Greek μέλος, 'a song,' it originally signified only a serious drama wherein a number of lyrics were introduced, becoming in some respects equivalent to opera. In this way both a tragedy of Æschylus and a piece by Metastasio might be included under the one term. With the operatic tendencies of the eighteenth century, however, melodrama, as distinguished from tragedy, tended to become increasingly more sensational, neglecting the characterization and the true tragic spirit for the sake of mere effect. Song, show, and incident became the prevailing characteristics in it, as buffoonery and extravagant development of plot did in farce.

PLOT AND CHARACTER.—In both farce and melodrama, therefore, there is an undue insistence upon incident. As, however, we found that farce was opposed to fine comedy and that melodrama was one of the chief antitheses to high tragedy, we may expect to find that all great drama, whether

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it be tragedy, comedy, or a species in which both are mingled, will be distinguished above all things by a penetrating and illuminating power of characterization, or at least by an insistence upon something deeper and more profound than mere outward events. The plot will, accordingly, not be of paramount importance. This statement brings us at once into conflict with what has always been regarded as one of the most famous dicta of Aristotle. It is well known that Aristotle has given to drama six main parts: Fable, Character, Diction, Thought, Decoration, and Music, and has decided categorically that "of all these parts the most important is the combination of incidents." "Because," he explains, "Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of Action—of life; and life consists in Action, and its end is Action of a certain kind, not quality. Now men's Character constitutes their quality; but it is by their Actions that they are happy, or the contrary. Tragedy, therefore, does not imitate Action for the sake of imitating Character, but in the imitation of Action that of Character is of course involved; so that the Action and the Plot are the end of Tragedy; and the end is of principal importance."<sup>1</sup>

It is fairly obvious here that Aristotle has for once been mistaken, that we have in fact to deal with a logical error. It may be admitted that no drama can exist without some kind of a plot, however slight. Drama, after all, is the telling of a story in dialogue. Even an apparently motionless play, such as Maeterlinck's *Les Aveugles*, has a plot, a story, flimsy perhaps, but nevertheless the background against which the characters are outlined. At the same time, it can never be admitted that the plot is of chief importance

<sup>1</sup> *Poetics*, chapter vi. The reading of the first sentence of this quotation is in the simplified form, now, I believe, usually preferred. Though Butcher makes a plea for a wider sense of *πρᾶξις* than 'action' the fact remains that classical enthusiasts from the Renaissance to Arnold have allowed Aristotle's insistence on 'action' to guide them.



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in a drama, or that it is the plot that gives to a great tragedy or to a great comedy its outstanding position. That outstanding position must come from the presentation of character, from the ideas and the atmosphere and the style of the drama, for all of which the plot but forms the setting. The Greek tragic poets utilized mere threadbare tales; Shakespeare, with a divine hand, drew his stories from scattered volumes of Italian *novelle* or from dramas which had been written by his predecessors. The plot is merely the framework on which is embroidered the gorgeous tapestry of the poet's invention.

On the other hand, a certain plea may be made for Aristotle's statement. The drama cannot be looked at from one angle alone. There are, indeed, two main methods of approaching tragedy and comedy, the one through the printed page, and the other through the medium of the spoken word in the theatre. It by no means follows that the two views will coincide so as to present the same object in the same light. Let us take as examples *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In reading either of these plays we hardly think of the plot. Is it *Hamlet*? At once the figure, the character, the words of the hero spring into our mind. After that, it is the characters of the lesser *dramatis personæ* that flash before us; then the more salient scenes of the play—the ghost walking on the battlements, the play within the play, the scene of the gravediggers. Character, diction, situation—all of these, not the plot, make *Hamlet* great for us in the study. Is it *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Here probably the characters do not strike us so forcibly, although at once Bottom and his companions spring up before our minds. It is in this case rather the atmosphere of the play, the delicate aroma of spring-flowering poetry, the fairy-world, that capture our attention. Again situation, diction, character—never the plot.

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If, on the other hand, we turn to the theatre what do we find? Not only with Elizabethan but also with modern audiences it is the plot that absorbs most attention. In *Hamlet* it is the peculiar, singularly delayed action of the piece, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the strange inversions and complicated amours, that serve to attract and keep interested the attention of the spectators. We have, then, to face fairly this exceedingly difficult problem—whether the drama should be studied as a part of literature or as a product of the theatre. A great drama regarded as a piece of literature depends for its greatness on something far other than mere plot; a play to be successful on the stage (unless it be a pure piece of show as have been not a few of our more recent Eastern triumphs) demands a plot well knit, intriguing, full of interest, and artistically conceived. The point of view of the theatre and the point of view of the study, therefore, not only do not coalesce, but are poles asunder. It is not the poetry of *Hamlet* that has made that drama a great stage success from the seventeenth century onward, and which has made it appeal to the audiences of countless lands; it is the plot, the theme of revenge cleverly told. It is not the plot of *Hamlet*, on the other hand, that has made that play the most outstanding and the most profound in the eyes of the amateurs and the critics of Shakespeare; it is the inner qualities that have constituted it a work of supreme literary art.

### (iv) CHARACTERIZATION AND INWARDNESS

INWARDNESS IN TRAGEDY.—In pursuing our investigation we have found that in every great tragedy which has had a stage as well as a closet success there is in reality a double tragedy; in every great comedy there is likewise a double source of the comic spirit. The inner tragedy is what has



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made all great dramas what they are. In comedy there may be buffoonery, there may be a quite noticeable amount of farcical elements, but there must also be a bubbling inner wit. Farce and melodrama, therefore, will be found to be distinguished from fine comedy and from high tragedy in that they have nothing, or practically nothing, that makes an inward appeal, whereas, on the other hand, even a high tragedy, such as *Hamlet*, may have decidedly melodramatic or sensational elements in the plot, and a fine comedy, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, may utilize for stage purposes elements which, if not precisely farcical, depend in some way or another on mere external merriment. While in this book, designed for the reader rather than for the spectator, most attention will be centred on the drama as a form of literature to be studied in the library, it must be remembered that both points of view have always to be borne in mind when criticizing any play. We must both discount from and add to our appreciation of *Hamlet* by a consideration of that tragedy as a drama written to be acted and with an acknowledged success upon the stage.

While we recognize this fact, that a play makes its appeal in the theatre largely through an outer series of incidents, whereas it makes its appeal in the library for something apart from incident, we must also recognize that in the theatre some part at least of the inner tragedy and of the inner comedy may be appreciated; and as civilization has advanced the inner elements have been ever more markedly stressed, possibly partly because of an increased sensitiveness in the audience, but much more because of a new appeal made by the drama to a larger reading public. If we contrast the theatre of the Greeks with the theatre of the Elizabethans we shall note how much deeper and more profound the modern tragedy has become. Supreme poetry may be found in both; but there is an atmosphere in

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*Hamlet* and in *Lear*, even in lesser plays such as Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* and Otway's *The Orphan*, which is lacking in Sophocles' *Ædipus Coloneus* and *Philoctetes*. This inwardness, to use Professor Vaughan's phrase,<sup>1</sup> is the marked characteristic of modern as opposed to ancient drama, and it is arrived at partly from a deeper power and sense of psychological analysis—the presentation of *états de l'âme* rather than of mere situation—partly by that greater freedom of the romantic drama which permits of development of character, and partly also by a new atmosphere connected with these two things, yet in some ways independent of both. The very fact that we can watch *Lear* changing from a headstrong, imperious monarch to a chastened human being, the very fact that we can watch the development of character in a figure such as Monimia,<sup>2</sup> shows to us the power that lies in the romantic drama discovered only in the Middle Ages and unknown to the rigidity of the Greek stage. That this inwardness has increased rather than degenerated in the still more recent period is a fact that requires little proof. Modern investigations into the realms of psychology have opened up new ways for the playwrights, and in a dramatist of the genius of Ibsen we discover that character and atmosphere have been stressed far more deeply than in preceding drama. If we come still later into the present century and glance at the plays of Maeterlinck we find there has been yet a farther advance from the inwardness of Elizabethan drama, for Maeterlinck's peculiar genius, reinforced by his philosophical beliefs, is able to carry us into a strange world where only the subconscious self, the soul, is heard.

<sup>1</sup> The ultimate form of his decision is that "the unvarying tendency of tragedy—and even the work of Ibsen is no exception—has been from the less to the more ideal, from the less to the more inward" (*Types of Tragic Drama*, p. 271).

<sup>2</sup> In Otway's *The Orphan*.

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The mysterious chant of the Infinite, the ominous silence of the soul and of God, the murmur of Eternity on the horizon, the destiny or fatality that we are conscious of within us, though by what tokens none can tell—do not all these underlie King Lear, Macbeth, Hamlet? And would it not be possible, by some interchanging of the *rôles*, to bring them nearer to us, and send the actors farther off? Is it beyond the mark to say that the true tragic element, normal, deep-rooted, and universal, that the true tragic element of life only begins at the moment when so-called adventures, sorrows, and dangers have disappeared? Is the arm of happiness not longer than that of sorrow, and do not certain of its attributes draw nearer to the soul? Must we indeed roar like the Atrides, before the Eternal God will reveal Himself in our life? and is He never by our side at times when the air is calm, and the lamp burns on, unflickering? . . . Indeed, when I go to a theatre, I feel as though I were spending a few hours with my ancestors, who conceived life as something that was primitive, arid, and brutal; but this conception of theirs scarcely even lingers in my memory, and surely it is not one that I can share. I am shown a deceived husband killing his wife, a woman poisoning her lover, a son avenging his father, a father slaughtering his children, children putting their father to death, murdered kings, ravished virgins, imprisoned citizens—in a word, all the sublimity of tradition, but alas, how superficial and material! Blood, surface-tears, and death! What can I learn from creatures who have but one fixed idea, and who have no time to live, for that there is a rival, or a mistress, whom it behoves them to put to death? <sup>1</sup>

This, probably, is the most important piece of creative criticism on the drama that has appeared for the last century. We see it expressed in the theatre itself, not only in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, but in many of the domestic dramas of Ibsen. There is an attempt in both to pass from the Shakespearian conception of tragedy to another conception more fitting to the modern age. There is an endeavour to move

<sup>1</sup> *The Treasure of the Humble*, essay on "The Tragical in Daily Life," translated by Alfred Sutro.

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from the tragedy of blood and of apparent greatness to the tragedy where death is not a tragic fact and where apparent greatness is dimmed by an inner greatness. Shakespeare found the world of character, of inner tragedy; the modern age has found the world of the subconscious, adapting it, as every age has adapted the desires and the moods of its time, to the requirements of the theatre. It is for this reason that we may regard this and similar pronouncements of Maeterlinck as the greatest contribution to the development of the drama since the end of the sixteenth century. It is a proof that the creative instinct in the theatre is still vital and pulsating.

INWARDNESS IN COMEDY.—In comedy the same or a similar movement may be traced. If we contrast a play of Terence with a play of Shakespeare or a play of Congreve we discover that, whereas in the Roman piece most of the stress of the comic spirit was laid upon incident with occasional characterization, the comedy of Shakespeare depends largely on character, with the introduction of that peculiarly modern branch of the comic to which we give the name of humour, and that the comedy of Congreve depends largely upon an inner wit, independent often of incident and of plot. Shakespeare's comedies are good acting plays because he has been careful to elaborate artistically an interesting story, paying attention both to the inner comedy and to the outer; but the modern tendency can be carried so far, both in tragedy and in comedy, that the plays cease to interest save in a written form. One of the reasons why so many of the tragedies produced during the period of the Romantic Revival failed on the stage was that in those plays the poets were interested solely in the development of an inner theme, leaving the actual tale either untold or but hastily sketched in. Where Shakespeare had kept a balance they swept to the extreme that lies opposed to

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melodrama. In comedy the same phenomenon is visible. Many critics have pronounced Congreve's *The Way of the World* the finest English comedy; yet why was that play a failure on the stage at its first production and not very popular thereafter? Precisely because there is in it no plot, because the comic is all of the inner type, capable of being appreciated only in slow and deliberate reading. *The Way of the World* is too fine to be appreciated in the theatre; the laughter in it arises not from incidents or even from situation, but from the use of words and the graceful playing of a brilliant fancy. Just as the true force of *Hamlet* is lost on the stage, so the true wit of Congreve's masterpiece is lost, and in it there is nothing to take the place of the absorbing theme of *Hamlet*. The truth of this is easily demonstrable by a glance at the other plays of the Restoration comic dramatist. *Love for Love* was successful; *The Old Batchelor* was successful. Why? Because in these two plays, while there is a sparkling inner wit, there is also an appeal made to the outward sources of laughter. Plot, incidents, and situation are all utilized for comic effect. Farquhar's plays were probably still more successful on the stage because in them the inner wit that Congreve knew is for the most part absent, the comic of situation taking its place. The scene between Mrs Parley and Colonel Standard in *A Trip to the Jubilee*, and the scene between Lady Lurewell and Monsieur Marquis in the same play, depend for their effect purely on outward sources of laughter; there is in them not a sparkle of Congreve's genius. Dryden's greatest stage successes have the same qualities. *Sir Martin Mar-all* made its appeal for no wit of words or of fancy, but for the comic development of the plot. The humour of *Amphitryon* depends entirely, or almost entirely, upon mere absurd situation. The presence of Jove in a man's form, the opposition of the thievish

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Mercury and the shivering, aggrieved Sosia—these are what made this play a success in its own time and in the eighteenth century, and called forth laughter at the recent revival of it by the Phoenix Society.

Our investigation, then, has led us slightly farther, to a realization of a set of facts which may thus be summarized: the spectator demands primarily incident, the reader inner comedy and inner tragedy; while the tendency of modern drama, both serious and comic, has been toward a stressing of the inner at the expense of the outer.

### (v) THE CONFLICT

OUTER CONFLICT IN TRAGEDY.—The facts just mentioned become still more apparent when we come to consider that cardinal part of drama, the conflict. All drama ultimately arises out of conflict. In tragedy there is ever a clash between forces physical or mental or both; in comedy there is ever a conflict between personalities, between the sexes, or between an individual and society. In tragedy the “pity and terror,”<sup>1</sup> to use Aristotle’s famous phrase, issues out of this conflict; in comedy the essence of the laughable is derived from the same source.

It is obvious that in tragedy there may be manifold varieties of the principle of conflict manifested not only in different dramas but even in one single play. The purely outward conflict is the first type to catch our attention. Here a struggle between two physical forces (which may be characters), or between two minds, or between a person and a force beyond that person, is to be found most fully expressed in the drama of ancient Greece. Because of the restrictions of the Athenian stage, inducing as they did a theatrical productivity of statuesque proportions and

<sup>1</sup> On the validity of the phrase, however, see *infra*, pp. 71 ff.



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atmosphere, the tragedy of Æschylus, of Sophocles, and of Euripides presents the paradox of depending upon action, in the sense that the tragic conflict is an outward conflict, and yet of ruling out action, in the sense of movement, from the development of the plot. It might be more correct to say, as Professor Vaughan has pointed out, that the Greek drama is a drama of situation, a particular species of dramatic effort handed on to the neo-classic playwrights of France and Italy. This situation is nearly always one of outward struggle; struggle of a man with some force outside himself, as with Orestes and the Furies, or struggle of man with man, as with Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, Ulysses and Andromache.<sup>1</sup> This outer conflict is obviously the most primitive of all types of tragic struggle. It requires genius to raise it to the height of impassioned art. A minor dramatist working on a romantic theme in a romantic manner may in some place reach a height that is truly arresting; but only a Racine and an Alfieri can make of the drama of situation a thing of pulsating truth and interest. The outer conflict, on the other hand, is not, of course, confined to the classic or to the neo-classic schools. The founder of the English romantic drama, Christopher Marlowe, except in one scene of *Dr Faustus* and in the historical play of *Edward II*, presents nothing to us but the clash of external figures and forces. Tamburlaine the Great in the play of that title stands in opposition to the force of life; Barabas in the *Jew of Malta* is a tragic figure because of his similar position. The interest of both plays depends first on the clash between one dominating personality and a world of lesser figures, and secondly on the clash between that dominating personality and a power beyond and above it.

INNER CONFLICT IN TRAGEDY.—Opposed to this is the inward conflict, impossible of realization in its purest form.

<sup>1</sup> In Seneca's *Troades*.

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Inwardness, as we have seen, is a characteristic of the modern as contrasted with the ancient drama, and this inwardness is nowhere better seen than in the field of tragic struggle. In spite of the ridicule cast by academicians on the old formula of 'Seneca + morality = Shakespearian drama,' one cannot avoid believing that the old struggle in the moralities, with the stock figures of *Humanum Genus* or *Everyman* beset by temptations and befriended by good angels, must have been the inspiring force in the development so marked in Elizabethan times of a conflict going on within the mind of the hero, a conflict no longer of force with force, or even of mind with mind, but of emotion with emotion, of thought with thought. In the Elizabethan drama appears for the first time the conception of an inner struggle moving alongside of an outer conflict, the one mingling with the other, both contributing to the essence of the tragedy, but the former assuming greater and more dominating importance. Thus in *Othello* we have the outward conflict between Othello and Iago, which takes up the attention of the eye ; but beyond that there is Othello's own mind, and it is the battle that rages there which has made *Othello* into a masterpiece of the world's art. In *Hamlet*, similarly, there is the outward conflict between Hamlet and the Ghost, between Hamlet and Claudius, but the real essence of the tragedy lies within the mind of Hamlet himself. The outward struggle is more apparent in *Lear* ; but it vanishes again in *Macbeth*, wherein the value of the play lies in the struggle so clearly marked within the mind and the heart of the murderous king.

As the romantic drama is not all of this type, so we find that the neo-classic dramas, based though they may be on the older Greek conception, and misled though they may have been by classical enthusiasm for the 'fable,' have nevertheless, many of them, combined the inward and the



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outward struggle in a primitive but arresting manner. The Love and Honour plays of our own Restoration period are but an extreme example of a tendency visible in Racine and in Alfieri. We may laugh at Dryden's conception of Almanzor or of Montezuma, but, after all, these characters are but simplified and exaggerated examples of the inner conflict. It is not in species that they differ from Othello and Hamlet; we might even say that the first at least of these two Shakespearian figures also displays a battle between love and honour. It is in the manner of the presentation that they differ, first in that they are not complex studies, and secondly in that the conflict is not presented naturally, but through the medium of self-conscious declamation and oratory. Declamation and oratory, more finely managed and made more probable, mar too the cognate dramas of Racine, although here the inner struggle often assumes enthralling forms. If we take *Andromaque*, a play typical of a whole school of French tragedy-writing, we find a conflict in the mind of Andromaque, arising out of her love for her child and faith to her dead husband, a conflict in the mind of Hermione, arising out of her jealousy toward Andromaque and love for Pyrrhus, a conflict in the mind of Pyrrhus, arising out of his love for his gods and love for Andromaque, and a conflict in the mind of Oreste, arising out of his love for Hermione and his hate of Pyrrhus.

The classical or the neo-classic play, however, must, by reason of its self-imposed limitations, present this inward struggle only in a highly circumscribed form. The romantic type, because of the ease with which it can introduce development of character, offers larger opportunities, particularly for the display of a conflict derived from the performance of some action. As was noted above, a still further development of the inwardness and of the inner conflict is visible in a number of romantic plays of modern times. In the

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works of Maeterlinck and his school there is an inward and an outward conflict; but the inward conflict is not the conflict of Shakespeare's heroes. There is a struggle here, not between love and honour, not between two thoughts or two emotions, but between the conscious and the subconscious mind, between human ties and the ties of the soul. In *Pelléas et Mélisande* we have the outward struggle between Pelléas and Golaud; but that is of small importance when placed alongside of the deeper struggle in the soul of Pelléas and in the soul of the husband. The force of this new orientation on the part of some dramatists of modern days is well seen if we compare this play of *Pelléas et Mélisande* with a play of similar theme, but derived from the direct Shakespearian tradition, Stephen Phillips' *Paolo and Francesca*. In the latter tragedy the inwardness is of the most 'human' kind. The struggle in the heart of Paolo is one of simple love and honour; in that of Malatesta, of love for his wife and love for his brother. The conflict of Maeterlinck is removed one stage onward, and it is probable, as we have seen, that here as in other ways the theatre is adapting itself to the requirements of the time, and is showing itself ready for expansion to echo aright the demands of the newer age.

CONFLICT IN COMEDY.—This principle of conflict in tragedy is, as was pointed out, no less marked a feature of comedy. Here also the outward and the inward struggle is to be seen, although it takes other forms and has different ends.

One of the commonest and most obvious sources of the comic in the world of the theatre is the opposition of an individual or of a profession to society as a whole. M. Bergson, in his entertaining book *Le Rire*, has declared that all laughter is social in character and that it is fundamentally the reproof of a particular society to any eccentricity on the part of a single person or of a special class.

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Whether that view be accepted or not, it is plain that here lies one of the great and most commonly utilized media for the comic playwright. Satire may frequently enter in, for it is difficult to exclude satire from comedy, but the essence of the comic lies in the implied or directly stated contrast and conflict. The old father of Terence, the hypocritical Tartuffe of Molière, the longwinded Polonius of Shakespeare, the Restoration fop of Congreve, the eighteenth-century beau of Cibber, the notorious Mrs Malaprop of Sheridan—all these are set over against a world of normal society figures. A world of Poloniuses would not be laughable, nor would a world of Malaprops. Nor would these figures be laughable if we imagined them detached and abstracted from their environment. The whole of our mirth arises from the fact that they are set in juxtaposition with other 'ordinary' types. So Polonius becomes amusing when we see him set against Hamlet and Horatio, Mrs Malaprop when contrasted with Charles Surface and the rest, the Restoration fop when compared with the fine cultured gentleman of the age.

This conflict of the individual and of society is, naturally, often indistinguishable from a conflict between two individuals; but a distinction may be made. We find often that in comedy the laughable element is increased by the direct opposition of two eccentric individuals one to another, and by the indirect opposition of both to society as a whole. Thus Dogberry and Verges are foils to one another, although neither is comic until we think of both as opposed to a world of normal intelligences. Benedick and Beatrice are similarly amusing, although in a different manner, but both take their humorous complexion, so to speak, from the presence beside them of Claudio on the one hand and of Hero on the other.

Comedy, however, does not always depend upon eccentricities or abnormalities, and it would appear as if a conflict

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between an individual or a group with society is not always present in the mind of the dramatist or of the audience, either directly or indirectly. One of the chief *motifs* of artistic comedy has no direct bearing on this, namely, the comedy that arises out of a conflict of the sexes. According to Meredith, true comedy demands a certain state of society where men and women meet on equal terms, the laughter arising out of the clash of the male and female temperaments. Now we may have whole series of tragedies which depend almost entirely on heroes alone. Marlowe's are thus purely masculine, and even *Hamlet* is more masculine than feminine. On the other hand, most comedy is certainly bisexual. We might search in vain among the thousands of our comedies to discover one single play wherein there was not at least one principal woman figure.<sup>1</sup> The humour of *Twelfth Night*, the gaiety and the brilliance of *The Way of the World*, the sparkle of *The School for Scandal*, are all heightened by, or else take their very inspiration from, the conflict between the minds of men and of women. This laughter of the sexes, as we may style it, is apparently one of the most primitive emotions, and its source, as is perfectly obvious, arises directly out of an implied or stated antagonism. The man who is gaily outwitted by the woman, as in Fletcher's *The Tamer Tam'd*, the chiding woman mastered by her husband, as in *The Taming of the Shrew*, the primitive mate-hunt refined into cultured forms, of the woman for the man, as in Fletcher's *The Wild-Goose Chase*, or of the man for the woman, as in the same author's *The Scornful Lady*, will always remain stock situations in our theatre.

All of these are outward conflicts, struggles between an

<sup>1</sup> As Meredith has pointed out in his essay *On the Idea of Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit*, the women often overshadow the men. The typical example is Millamant in *The Way of the World*.

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individual and society, between two individuals, or between the sexes. There is no hint here of a comic inner struggle. This is not so easily developed as a sense of inner tragic conflict and is but rarely to be discovered. Comedy more frequently deals with simple than with complex characters, and accordingly has not the means whereby to suggest a struggle between two emotions in the heart of the one man or of the one woman. Where complexity enters into comedy there is usually a hint either of the pathetic or of the tragic. There is something laughable in Shylock's "My daughter ! O my ducats ! O my daughter !" partly because of the incongruity between the two objects, but partly because of the inner struggle they reveal. Yet Shylock's words are not comic ; they approach very near to the borders of the tragic. In the same way there is occasional laughter that arises from the words of Lear's fool, because these words reveal in the mind of the Fool a conflict between profound intelligence and disordered wits. Here again, however, the figure of the Fool is not comic but pathetic, a fitting foil to Lear's agony. The inner conflict of this type, then, although it is the glory of all post-Elizabethan tragedy, will be found not fitted for pure comic expression.

There is, however, one type of inner conflict which marks out the works of the finest comic dramatists, a conflict not between two thoughts or two emotions, but between two fancies, leading toward what is usually known as *esprit* or wit. Wit is a word that has often been explained. Locke, as is well known, has defined it as being that quality of our mind that brings together ideas with quickness and variety. Addison adopted Locke's definition, but added that wit often deals not only with the congruity of ideas but also with their opposition. Whatever definition we adopt we shall find that wit is opposed to humour and to the absurd

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in that it is intellectual, conscious, artificial, and refined. It is conscious and intellectual in that the creator of wit, although he may be laughed with, is never laughed at ; he is deliberately saying laughable things. It is artificial in that it arises not out of natural buffoonery or unconscious eccentricity. It is refined in that it appears nowhere in primitive nations, having been developed by long centuries of intellectual pursuits and of cultured conversation. Fundamentally, wit arises out of the conflict of two ideas or of an idea and an object. The *bon mot* is the expression of a clash between two several fancies or ideas, combined for one moment together. In its most obvious form it issues forth as a pun ; in its highest it appears as a merely implied confusion of two conceptions. It marks an intellectual acumen, the swift juxtaposition of two ideas fundamentally inharmonious.

It is this conflict of fancies that appears as the marked characteristic of modern comedy. It appears in Shakespeare's plays as a kind of effervescence over the prevalent atmosphere of humour ; it assumes chief place in the comedies of Congreve and his companions of the manners school. On this depends the charm of *The Way of the World*, *The School for Scandal*, and *The Importance of being Earnest*.

### (vi) UNIVERSALITY

So far, if we may pause for a moment to summarize our results, we have found that conflict is the prime force in all drama ; that an outward conflict is what appeals most in the theatre ; and that an inward conflict appeals most in the study. A play will be great as a piece of literature only when it leaves the borders of farce on the one hand and of melodrama on the other ; it will be a great stage and literary success only when it combines the two characteristics.



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We may have, however, a tragedy or a comedy wherein character is deeply stressed and the inward is consciously or unconsciously marked, and which yet may not be a great literary triumph. It may be laid down as an axiom that beyond the characterization and the inwardness there must go some general atmosphere or spirit which, as it were, enwraps the whole development of the 'fable' and tinges the characters with a peculiar and dominating hue. This spirit or atmosphere I shall call universality.

Let us again turn from abstract theories to concrete examples. Let us take the anonymous Elizabethan tragedy of *Arden of Feversham*. This is a well-conceived and a well-penned drama: the very fact that it has been attributed to Shakespeare proves that. Not only is the dialogue excellent, but the construction is balanced and harmonious, and the characters are delineated in a manner reached by but few of the Elizabethan playwrights. We cannot deny that the play is a good one; and yet, when we place it alongside of *Hamlet* or *Lear* or *Macbeth*, we feel not only that it is not as great as these, but that it does not stand in the same class of dramatic productivity. *Hamlet* and *Lear* and *Macbeth*, we say, are high tragedies: *Arden of Feversham* is merely a serious drama. There is evidently something lacking in the play, but it is nothing directly concerned with plot, diction, or character. What precisely is it that constitutes its failure? Or, conversely, what is it, lacking in *Arden of Feversham*, which makes Shakespeare's plays great? *Arden of Feversham* is a domestic tragedy: it is merely a dramatized ballad telling of a husband murdered by his wife and her lover. It is a domestic play, but domestic plays are not necessarily to be ruled out of the realms of high tragedy; most of Ibsen's dramas rise to a height approaching the masterpieces of Shakespeare; so does Otway's *The Orphan* and Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*.

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When we come to look deeper we see that the real cause of failure does not lie in the subject but in the treatment of the subject. *Arden of Feversham* deals with an independent and isolated event, and we call it sordid, as we would call a similar newspaper account of some recent murder sordid. The emotion implied by this adjective cannot perhaps be very well defined accurately, but it signifies at any rate that the reader of the play or of the newspaper paragraph has not been thrilled by what has been put before him. The account seems bald and bare, uninformed by any broader and higher significance. There is, to use the word with which we started, no universality in it. There is universality in *Hamlet*; there is universality in *Othello*, which deals, we may note, with a theme somewhat similar to that of *Arden of Feversham*; there is universality in *Venice Preserv'd* and in *A Doll's House* and in *Rosmersholm*.<sup>1</sup> It is a spirit of universality that marks out every great drama, no matter when or where that drama was produced. In what this universality consists and how it is attained may be fittingly left to our more precise investigation of the nature of tragedy itself.

Universality of a kind will also be found to mark out fine comedy. There is a sense in all great comedy, as there is in all great tragedy, that the events and the characters are not isolated. They are related in some way or another to the world of ordinary life. In the *Tartuffes* and the *Bobadills* and the *Dogberrys* of fine comedy we see, as it were, abstracts of mankind; there is nothing particular or isolated about them. If, however, we find in a comedy a person such as Dryden's Bibber, in *The Wild Gallant*, we have a feeling that that person is independent, that he is

<sup>1</sup> I do not here intend to suggest that Otway, Heywood, and Ibsen are as great dramatists as Shakespeare, but merely that their finest plays belong to the same *class* of dramatic productivity.



## TRAGEDY AND COMEDY

not connected with other figures, that he is a unique specimen of a particular madness. Extraordinary eccentricity is not truly laughable in a comedy : that which is risible is the fashions, the manners, the professions, the classes of mankind. Universality is demanded here as it is demanded in tragedy.

In a consideration of this universality in both comedy and tragedy, Aristotle's remarks on certain characteristics of drama ought not to be neglected. In his *Poetics* he pleads that high tragedy has a certain idealizing power, and that there is a generalizing element in all fine comedy. "The poet and the historian," he declares, "differ not by writing in verse or in prose. The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history, with metre no less than without it. The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history [διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποίησις ἱστορίας ἐστίν]: for poetry tends to express the universal [τὰ καθόλου], history the particular."<sup>1</sup> It is evident that these words of Aristotle have more than a little in common with the plea for universality in drama put forward in the preceding pages and discussed at greater length in those following. At the same time, Aristotle's τὰ καθόλου does not go far beyond the general spirit of a piece of art : it does not seem to take into account the many and diverse means by which the dramatists and the poets have secured their effect of universality. *Arden of Feversham*, certainly, to refer again to a concrete instance, would fall under Aristotle's heading of 'history,' as being merely a more or less faithful

<sup>1</sup> On the universality of Greek literature and on the exact signification of Aristotle's words Butcher's *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* should be consulted.

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retelling in dramatic form of an actual occurrence; but nowhere does Aristotle analyse in detail the characteristics of those dramas which, in his judgment, rise above the 'historical' plane to that of the 'more philosophical' poetry. In the following pages, therefore, the treatment of tragedy has frequently had to be carried along lines nowhere mapped out by the Greek critic, and as a consequence we must note that, although his τὰ καθόλου is ever with us, yet for detail and for the estimating of particular means and effects, except perhaps where he speaks about the nature of the tragic hero, he has left us in his work no guiding clues.

## II

### TRAGEDY

#### (i) UNIVERSALITY IN TRAGEDY

**I**N passing from the more general consideration of the main characteristics of the higher types of drama to a more detailed analysis of tragedy and of comedy in particular, it will be necessary, even at the risk of some repetition, to cover some of the ground already traversed, in an endeavour to investigate the methods and the styles of the various dramatists. As the question of universality is, as has been shown, one of paramount importance in any study of tragedy, it may form the groundwork of this analysis.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HERO.**—We have already seen that universality is an absolutely necessary element in every great tragedy. The question now arises as to how and by what particular methods it has been achieved by dramatists ancient, Elizabethan, and modern. Is it arrived at externally, is it instinct in the conception of character, or is it attained both from within and from without?

Here there is space only for a few considerations and suggestions.

We may well start our investigation by quoting a few words of Aristotle. The tragic hero, he states, "should be some one of high fame and flourishing prosperity." High fame and flourishing prosperity are phrases not exactly synonymous with kingship, but sufficiently close to it to make Aristotle responsible for all the later neo-classic dicta concerning the illustrious nature of the hero of tragedy.

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Where this subject of illustriousness is not dealt with by any later classical critic, we may assume that it was so much taken for granted that nothing needed to be said of it. For the Greeks domestic tragedy would have been impossible; for the Augustans it was anathema.

Not only classical precept, however, demanded a monarch or an illustrious person for a tragic hero. In medieval days it was tacitly assumed that all tragedy dealt with kings and with princes, an assumption arrived at independently of Aristotle and his followers. Chaucer's Monk says:

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,  
As olde bokes maken us memorie,  
Of him that stood in greet prosperitee  
And is y-fallen out of heigh degree  
Into miserie, and endeth wrecchedly.<sup>1</sup>

And the stories that he tells deal almost entirely with earthly potentates, save for a few Biblical and mythological personages.

The conception of tragedy as the falling from prosperity into misery and wretchedness we shall consider in greater detail hereafter; for the moment let us concern ourselves solely with this view of the tragic hero, a view shared by the classical and by the medieval tradition alike. When we consider this view in the light of the spirit of universality it is evident that here we have one of the crudest, although at the same time one of the commonest, methods of securing some atmosphere that goes beyond the mere figures presented on the stage. The presence of a person of prominence as a hero gives the sense that more is involved than is apparent on the surface. In the times when kingship meant more

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted here that as drama was largely non-existent in the medieval world, except in the shape of the mysteries, 'tragedy' means for Chaucer merely tragic tales such as his Monk puts forward.

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than it does to-day (at least for the majority of Western nations), men saw in the monarch-hero not merely an individual in the pangs of misery and despair, but a symbol of the whole fate of a kingdom. In modern days, of course, this method of securing universality is of no avail. Having lost all respect for kings, living as we do in lands where democracy reigns in fact if not always in theory, we have abandoned this idea that a king's fortunes are necessarily bound up with the fortunes of his subjects. It is futile now; at its best it was perhaps but a feeble way out of a difficulty; but for the age of classical Greece and for the medieval world it was a thoroughly legitimate method of gaining this end. In Elizabethan days its power and its value were already fading. The appearance of *Arden of Feversham* and of *A Woman Killed with Kindness* in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries may be regarded as the attempts of unconscious revolutionaries to overthrow the old conventions, to express something more in keeping with a newer age. Those plays are to be associated with the gradual rise of parliamentary control and the emergence of the middle classes, just as Lillo's *The London Merchant*, which was actually as revolutionary as the Jacobins, is to be looked at from the point of view of that rapidly changing English society of the mid-eighteenth century.

While we recognize, however, that the presence of the monarch-hero as a means of securing universality is now impossible, and that even in Elizabethan times the convention was becoming threadbare, we must remember that if we abandon such themes of "fitting magnitude" then something must be introduced which may take the place of that emotion which the fall of a king or of a prince aroused in earlier days. There is the warning of *Arden of Feversham* ever before us. The theme of this play is 'lowered' from the seventeenth-century point of view, and nothing is given

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in compensation. Herein, we shall find, lies one of the main difficulties of the domestic drama.

INTRODUCTION OF THE SUPERNATURAL.—It must not be supposed, of course, that the introduction of a royal hero was the sole method employed by the ancient dramatists to secure universality. There are many others, not mentioned by Aristotle, but figuring in plays Greek as well as English. Of these probably the most potent is the direct presentation of some force that is extra-human, a force that at once serves as a fairly powerful means of obtaining an atmosphere broader than the mere individual events enacted upon the stage, and of providing some emotion of awe which, it will be found, is one of the prime essentials of tragedy. If we take the famous trilogy of *Æschylus*—*Agamemnon*, *Choephoræ*, and *Eumenides*—we discover that part at least of the spirit of these plays comes from the sense of the supernatural, presented not only visibly but by intellectual suggestion. The Furies enter upon the stage in person; the ghost of Clytemnestra rises and addresses the audience; and, over and above these, there is a vast indefinite background of fate. A whole house is doomed. Disaster, misery, crime follow on the footsteps of its every scion. No one can escape; the curse lies beyond the power and control of the particular actors. Immediately, by this means, an otherwise ‘sordid’ story of murder and revenge has been carried to higher levels, and assumes at once a peculiar significance of its own.

There appear, naturally, many divergent means of introducing this supernatural in tragedy, stretching from the crude presentation of a ghostly figure to the merest suggestion of an indefinable atmosphere where nothing is dogmatically stated, but where vague hints, half-visionary floating wisps of thought and feeling, are cast before the spectators. The introduction of a god into a play is the most simple of all,

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but this, as is perfectly obvious, was possible only in the dramas of Greece and in the primitive mysteries of medieval Europe. In Elizabethan plays, as in the modern theatre, the presence of a heavenly visitant is almost always impossible. The failure of Fletcher's *Cupid's Revenge* is due entirely to the insertion of the God of Love in human shape persecuting the mortal figures around him. There is at once something crude and incongruous in his presence. We have lost the religion that might have made possible for us his interference in the development of the plot, and we have lost the medieval *naïveté* that might have acquiesced in his appearance. More delicate use of heavenly agents may perhaps be found in the angels of Massinger and Dekker's *The Virgin Martyr* or in the disguised spirits of Yeats' *Countess Cathleen* ; but for the most part the introduction of heavenly or diabolic forces in modern drama must be abnormal and unsuited to the tastes and beliefs of the age. Ghosts, on the contrary, dominated the Elizabethan as they dominated the Greek stage. They were accepted by the spectators with a kind of awed wonder. They were dramatically true in those days ; and even in this twentieth century there are some among us who have not abandoned faith in their reality and their power. In Æschylus, as we have seen, they made their early appearance. They were taken over by Euripides, and especially developed by him as spirits, symbols, and even instruments of revenge. Seneca seized upon them, and thence they passed over to Kyd and to the Elizabethan theatre generally. The ghost of Hamlet's father is therefore the direct descendant, with a clearly traceable genealogy, of the ghost of Clytemnestra in the *Eumenides*.

It will at once be observed that the dramatic force of the ghost, just as that of the monarch-hero, will depend largely upon the faith of the audience. If a ghost be put forward



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as an integral part of a serious play, *in propria persona*, a touch of cynicism or of active disbelief will kill at once the particular mood which it is the business of tragedy to call forth in us. This truth apparently was realized, probably unconsciously, by Shakespeare, and his example is so important that perhaps a moment may be spent here in considering his special treatment of this theme. The Greek ghosts were for the most part ordinary supernatural visitants, which, though connected with the lives and the actions of the *dramatis personæ*, were fundamentally separated from them. With Shakespeare the supernatural is always related to the thoughts and the ideas of at least one living tragic character. *Hamlet* will serve as an example. In this play the prince is made to have his suspicions of the murder of his father before ever he sees the spirit. "I doubt some foul play," are his words at the close of Act I, Scene II. "O my prophetic soul!" he cries on hearing the truth from the immaterial lips of his sire (Act I, Scene v). The ghost in *Hamlet* is the crudest of all Shakespeare's 'ghosts, and yet how wonderfully it is suggested, and how far Shakespeare has escaped the difficulties presented by dogmatic introduction of the supernatural in an age of doubt and of speculation, may well be seen when we compare the ghost of *Hamlet* with the ghost of Andrea in *The Spanish Tragedy*. In the latter there is no preparation made for the spirit's appearance. It is thrust forward on to the stage at the start, and its very crudeness must startle and disappoint not only those who, in Jonson's words, are "somewhat costive of belief," but those who firmly believe in these visitants from another world.

It may be noted further that Shakespeare not only thus suggests, in the words of the hero, this connexion between the personality of Hamlet and the ghost itself, but in other ways tends to mitigate the crude appearance of the

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supernatural. The ghost in *Hamlet* is not wholly visible. Bernardo and Marcellus, certainly, see it; but to Hamlet's mother it is but as air, a mere hallucination in the mind of her son. It speaks, but it speaks only to him. It is materialized, and yet there is always the faint hint that, after all, it is connected with Hamlet's personality. The eternal elusiveness of Shakespeare is operating here. His suggestiveness is the suggestiveness of genius.

Not any of Shakespeare's other ghosts are so corporeal as this of the "royal Dane." Banquo's spirit is more immaterial. It rises on the stage, but it is Macbeth alone who sees it. It is, if not wholly, at least partially, a creation of his own mind: or rather, we cannot tell from it whether Shakespeare really intended it to be an independent creation or not. As with the ghost of Hamlet's father, so with the witches in this play of *Macbeth*, figures only partly connected with forces outside of physical nature, we have a sense of kinship between the supernatural and the emotions of the hero. Their thoughts and their words attune themselves to, and harmonize with, the thoughts of Macbeth. "Fair is foul, and foul is fair," is their cry in the first scene of the play; and Macbeth's "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" on his first entry is an echo symbolically conceived.

Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear  
Things that do sound so fair?

inquires Banquo after the triple prophecy, revealing in his surprise the state of Macbeth's soul, which had but responded to the utterance of his unspoken dreams. The thane is "rapt withal," rapt in the thoughts that rise within him, thoughts of kingship and of murder. The letter that he sends to his wife displays clearly enough the fact that the sinning pair had discussed the matter in days long before the

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witches had appeared to him on the heath. These witches, therefore, are in part corporeal, in part supernatural, in part the personified temptations of Macbeth himself. There is the sense that we are in touch with infinite, indefinable, and intangible forces of the universe ; and yet there remains a doubt. The subtlety of Shakespeare disarms our preconception, whether that preconception be of belief or of disbelief.

THE SENSE OF FATE.—The ghost, however, even when treated with the genius of a Shakespeare, will always remain a somewhat crude method of introducing the supernatural. Much more effective probably and more refined is the general sense of fate which is presented in a number of tragedies both ancient and modern. In a drama such as *Ædipus Tyrannus* we feel that there is something which constantly baffles human effort. Fate appears above the stage like a fourth actor, playing a principal part, cheating, deceiving, betraying, watching with a grim smile the blundering actions of the miserable king. With Shakespeare again this sense of fate in tragedy reappears, although once more in a modified form. The only drama of his in which it is deeply to be felt is *Romeo and Juliet*, and this play is separated in many respects from the other great tragedies.

There are two points which might here be noted. First, Shakespeare presents to us in this and in his other dramas both chance, or luck, and fate. With chance there is barely a sense of an outer-world power governing our actions, although that sense may be hinted at, vaguely and in hesitating accents ; with fate, however, there is a direct assumption that a conscious or unconscious supernatural agent is guiding and shaping our actions. In *Romeo and Juliet*, as we have seen, the latter idea of fate is expressed. The lovers are “ ill-starred ” from the very beginning. Juliet has her premonitory vision of ill-fortune. Romeo’s words of hope

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at the opening of Act V are shattered and transformed as if some leering immaterial being had heard them and were jesting with his miserable puppet below. In the other tragedies Shakespeare appears usually to have preferred to imply simply chance. It was chance that led to Hamlet's boarding the pirate sloop; it was chance that made Duncan come to Macbeth; it was chance that brought Bianca in with the handkerchief when Othello was eavesdropping. Fate, direct fate, occurs only in the one early play.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, it is very noticeable, particularly as according with his usual habit of suggestion and with his own elusive attitude toward matters of doubt, that Shakespeare has frequently intensified the fatal as opposed to the chance sense of his tragedies by the introduction of some conversation between his characters on supernatural themes and on the influence of the heavenly bodies upon human action. This conversation on starry influence, however, is inconclusive in the sense that it tells us nothing of Shakespeare's own attitude. "This is the excellent foppery of the world," sneers Edmund, "that when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeit of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars." In the same play Kent, uninformed of Edmund's words, says,

It is the stars,

The stars above us, govern our conditions.

In other tragedies characters such as Iago with his "It is in ourselves that we are thus and thus" echo the words of Edmund, while others repeat in different forms the beliefs of Kent. It has been already noted by Professor Bradley that Shakespeare puts all his anti-fate speeches into the mouths of his bad characters, Edmund and Iago in particular;

<sup>1</sup> On Shakespeare's use of Fortune Dr Smart's essay on *Tragedy* should be consulted.

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but the converse to that has hardly been observed. It is true that these speeches are put into the mouths of evil persons, but those evil persons are clever and mentally alert ; whereas the belief in fate and in starry influence is all in the mouths of good, honest people, who are, however, like Kent, usually stupid and unintellectual. Shakespeare again takes up an attitude neither approving nor disapproving. He utilizes the sense of fate, but never employs any direct intervention in human affairs on the part of the gods, nor deliberately enunciates a belief in supernatural influence. Even his use of chance is incidental. Except in *Romeo and Juliet* it never operates on the main plot of a play so as to bring about the catastrophe. That Hamlet was brought back to Denmark was a piece of chance, but the death-covered stage at the close of the play arose out of no chance ; it was the direct result of the queen's indecision and weakness, of the king's duplicity, of Laertes' hate, and of Hamlet's loss of all care and interest in life.

TRAGIC IRONY.—Besides these methods of securing a sense of supernatural forces above and beyond the drama enacted upon the stage, there are many others, probably less tangible and less immediately apparent, yet none the less effective. The simple use of tragic irony really presupposes, or at any rate hints vaguely at, a force outside human ken. With the Greeks tragic irony was truly the warping by the gods of a speech or a promise of one of the *dramatis personæ* in a drama. This device is used but sparingly by Shakespeare, for it demands the assumption of a conscious fatal power in the universe—an assumption which, as we have seen, Shakespeare was not prepared to admit. The dramatic irony which arises out of theatrical circumstances is common in his works, but the deeper, more pagan, irony is largely absent. Minor supernatural effects, however, almost always introduced by narration, he employs constantly. We hear

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of the dead gibbering in the streets of Rome after Cæsar's fall ; we are told of horses going mad in *Macbeth*. Yet here again the sense of the supernatural is only partial.

The night has been unruly ; where we lay,  
Our chimneys were blown down, and, as they say,  
Lamentings heard i' the air, strange screams of death,  
And prophesying with accents terrible  
Of dire combustion and confused events  
New hatch'd to the woful time : the obscure bird  
Clamour'd the livelong night : some say, the earth  
Was feverous and did shake. . . .<sup>1</sup>

So we are told ; but we cannot be sure that Lennox is not mistaken. The supernatural events are given in hearsay, not in reality. It is noticeable in this speech that not only are the strange events not introduced upon the stage, but those which are most peculiar, the lamentings in the air and the shaking of the earth, are prefaced by Lennox himself with the qualifying phrase "as they say." All he avers he has seen or heard is the fall of chimneys and the hooting of the owl. Somewhat of the same nature is Casca's account of the prodigies witnessed before the death of Cæsar.<sup>2</sup> He himself has certainly seen "a tempest dropping fire," a slave whose hand was burning, a lion which "went surly by," but the "men all in fire" that walked "up and down the streets" were viewed, not by him, but only by a group of terror-stricken women.

**PATHETIC FALLACY.**—These last quotations from *Julius Cæsar* and from *Macbeth* also illustrate one other minor method of inducing a supernatural or semi-supernatural effect, a method employed most largely by Shakespeare. In his tragedies, and even in his comedies, there is utilized what may be styled a kind of pathetic fallacy, or rather,

<sup>1</sup> *Macbeth*, Act II, Scene III.

<sup>2</sup> *Julius Cæsar*, Act I, Scene III.



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perhaps, a species of natural symbolism. It is apparent in a slight way in Portia's "It is almost morning," in the last act of *The Merchant of Venice*. More clearly is it to be found in the words of Pedro in the last act of *Much Ado about Nothing*:

Good morrow, masters ; put your torches out :  
The wolves have prey'd ; and look, the gentle day,  
Before the wheels of Phœbus, round about  
Dapples the drowsy east with spots of grey.

It is evident in the darkness and the gloom of the castle in which Duncan is murdered, and in the storm scenes of *Lear*, where the lashing hail and the driving wind seem to sympathize with the aged king, the tempest outside symbolizing in a way the tempest of madness in his own brain. This natural symbolism has, of course, been used by other dramatic poets, ancient and modern, but not to the extent in which it appears in Shakespeare's dramas. The most marked example from the Greek stage is in the background of Sophocles' almost romantic tragedy of *Philoctetes*.

THE SUB-PLOT.—The presence of the monarch-hero and the use of the supernatural in one of its many forms are, as we have seen, two of the most frequent means of securing a feeling of universality employed by the Greek and by the Elizabethan playwrights. We may pass now to consider a fairly common romantic expedient, denied, because of the restrictions of their stage, to the ancients. This is the use of the sub-plot. To counter the sense of individuality and of detached tragic spirit which is raised by the presence in all great dramas of an outstanding personality for the hero, the Elizabethans, and Shakespeare in particular, frequently made the sub-plot a duplication or an explanation of the main theme of the play. Thus *Lear*'s circumstances and fate are not solitary and detached. He is driven out by the



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daughters who professed to love him, and is cared for by the daughter his own folly had driven away. In exactly similar manner Gloucester is cheated and betrayed by his loved son Edmund, while Edgar, whom he has injured, joins him in his misery and relieves his cares. This parallel so apparent in the sub-plot, and evidently introduced for a conscious purpose, gives the sense that the ill-treatment of Lear is no isolated thing: it is reflected elsewhere in the position of Gloucester, and, seeing this, we are led unconsciously to believe that it may have a much broader and wider significance. So too in *Macbeth* Banquo is assailed by temptations similar to those which had drawn the king to murder and to a life of crime. "Hush! no more," he says at the beginning of Act III, his evil thoughts dwelling upon ideas of kingship. Macbeth is thus not entirely alone; his position is not unrelated to the positions of others. Perhaps, also, we may see something of a similar phenomenon in *Othello* and in *Hamlet*. In both of these plays the sub-plot works rather by contrast than by parallel. The tragedy of *Othello* depends upon the apparent infidelity of a wife; and this theme of infidelity is caught up again in the relations between Iago and Emilia.<sup>1</sup> So in *Hamlet* the theme is revenge for a father's murder, and this is repeated in an altered form in the passion of Laertes at the death of Polonius. Here, as in *Othello*, however, the contrast is emphasized. Just as Iago is opposed to Othello, and Emilia's vulgarity to Desdemona's innocence, so Hamlet is opposed to the tempestuous and resolute Laertes, and Polonius, garrulous and weak, to the imaged figure of the "royal Dane."

Once more, as Shakespeare shows us, actual enunciation is not required in tragedy; suggestion, mere hints, facts mentioned in passing as purest trifles, suddenly and often unconsciously assume tremendous and dominating importance.

<sup>1</sup> Possibly also in those of Cassio and Bianca.

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**SYMBOLISM IN THE HERO.**—The employment of a sub-plot related to the main theme of the play is not one much utilized in our modern drama. There has been a certain reaction to the sometimes formless romanticism of the earlier stage, and this, coupled with the new requirements of the twentieth-century theatre, has tended to reduce both tragedy and comedy to something approaching classical proportions. Hardly one of these methods we have already considered, therefore, may be freely and naturally employed at the present day. There are, however, other ways open to modern dramatists, and of these the chief perhaps is the identification, not necessarily expressed in so many words, of the hero with an ideal, with a faith, or with a class—a method utilized to a minor extent by the Greeks, hardly at all by Shakespeare, and most largely by the dramatists of the last two centuries. If we refer once more to *Arden of Feversham* we shall find that Arden represents absolutely nothing outside himself. Had he been, as it were, the symbol of a type of men, had he embraced in himself the expression of a high ideal, had he passed beyond the limits of mere individual existence, then the play of which he was the hero might have risen almost to the level of Shakespearean greatness. Although lacking all other means of obtaining the feeling of universality, by royalty or suggestions of the supernatural or sub-plot, it would yet have taken on a new complexion; it would have gripped our attention and thrilled us as now it cannot do.

It has been pointed out by Professor Vaughan, who has thus followed the line laid down by Hegel, that the *Antigone* of Sophocles employs this device.<sup>1</sup> Creon there is the representative of a justice that is based on earthly laws;

<sup>1</sup> Although Professor Vaughan has not related the device to the securing of universality. For a criticism of Hegel's views in regard to this play see Dr Smart's *Tragedy*.

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Antigone is representative of a justice that transcends law as we know it and touches the deepest instincts of our higher natures. In a way, too, Heywood's *The English Traveller* rises above the limits of individuality, for Young Geraldine is more than an isolated figure. He is representative of a class of those honest and high-souled gentlemen who, after years of foreign travel, returned to their native homes, not *inglesi italianati*, *diavoli incarnati*, but with all their previous nobility strengthened, the dross of their beings purified by refinement and culture. It is this that makes Heywood's drama stand apart from the anonymous *Arden of Feversham*; it is the sense there is in it of something beyond the petty and the trivial and the temporary, something that has a value profound and universal.

Ibsen's plays abound in this identification. Dr Stockmann, in *An Enemy of the People*, is not merely an ordinary man: he embraces in himself a complete ideal of human life. He is representative at once of a class and of a faith; and the fact that he is so representative carries the action of the play to wider realms than those of a small Norwegian town and gives to the drama a universal appeal. Goethe's *Faust* presents a similar phenomenon; for *Faust* is in a way the interpretation of the spiritual beliefs and ideals of an entire age. The dramas of Björnson, Galsworthy, and Sardou are formed on the same plan.

This, probably, will be one of the main resources of the dramatist of the future. Our age is one of wide ideals, of individual-absorbing faiths, of broad classes; the period of Elizabeth, basing its existence on Renascence beliefs and aspirations, looked rather toward the personality. Mazzini's main objection to Shakespeare was that he had no definite outlook upon life, no political passion, no soul-dominating faith—"l'avvenire è muto nelle sue pagine, l'entusiasmo pei

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grandi principii ignorato"—but the Elizabethan age was like that. The passion for a faith apart from religion grew largely in later years. It was present in the Civil War of 1642; it was present in the Rebellion of 1688; but it did not reach its intensity until the French Revolution had founded a new world on the ashes of the old. The tendency of literature as of life since 1789 has been toward the expression of socialization, toward a grouping of personalities under broader standards; sometimes toward the very negation of personality, sometimes, as in anarchist thought expressed in literature by William Morris, toward the realization of personality only through grouping or collectivism. Future drama, expressing these tendencies, will therefore veer toward the presentation of vaster forces, of classes, of beliefs, either in abstract form, or, symbolically, through the concrete presence of a representative personality. Such plays as Galsworthy's *Strife* and *Justice* are not mere problem dramas; they are tragedies in which the forces and classes and beliefs of present-day existence meet and clash. In *Strife* the conflicting characters are not individuals, as they would have been in Elizabethan days; they are but figure-heads, symbols of elements too vast to be presented within the limits of an ordinary theatre. Everywhere in modern art we can witness a passion for this idealization, for the embodying of abstract or collective forces in concrete form. It reaches its fullest expression in a universal drama such as Hardy's *The Dynasts*. We may even expect to see in the near future an enlargement and alteration of the theatre, corresponding to the fuller realization of this passion. Reinhardt's new playhouse, with its vaster stage, capable of introducing crowds and masses of people, may well be taken as an example of the modern development in stage construction.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *infra*, pp. 113 ff.

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EXTERNAL SYMBOLISM.—Closely connected with this identification of the hero of a drama with a class or a faith goes that other use of what may be called external symbolism, a device employed by playwrights of all ages, but probably with most effect in our own days. There is a typical instance of this in the wild duck which is introduced into Ibsen's play of that name. The horses in *Rosmersholm* are examples of the same tendency. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* has a similar atmosphere. There is in all of these an endeavour to fix on some one object outside the characters themselves and to treat that object as a force, or symbolic of a force, operating from without on the action of the drama, or else to treat it as symbolic of a vaster sphere of action, connecting the *dramatis personæ* with the universe at large. It serves the double purpose of fusing together in one atmosphere the varying figures of the play, connecting them with the audience and with the world beyond the audience, and of providing some suggestion of forces apart from the events given on the stage. The roaring waters referred to so often in Masefield's *The Tragedy of Nan* act somewhat in this way. The ring and the well in Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* are symbolic and permanent, things immutable as the characters are not. The background of Przybyszewski's *Snow* has the same force. Here the wide expanse of snow, visible to the audience through the windows of the cosily warmed room, provides a general atmosphere for the tragedy. The snow is not only a symbol of Bronka's mind; it is a symbol of something outside Bronka, of something greater and eternal. Occasionally, this external symbolism is expressed in the form of a person, and in this manner links itself with the use of the supernatural. The nurse in this last-mentioned play of Przybyszewski's is symbolic, half-connected with another world. The old madman in *The Tragedy of Nan* has a similar power.

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witches give unity of tone and universality to *Macbeth*, as does the Ghost to *Hamlet*.

HEREDITY.—The introduction, however, of such a symbolic person is usually eschewed in modern tragedy for reasons that will at once be apparent. The old sense of fate has gone, and the direct suggestion of a supernatural force is somehow incongruous. Science and explanation of facts by natural means have taken the place of superstition and the belief in a direct superhuman influence. This change of attitude is seen nowhere more clearly than in the disappearance of the ancient Greek theme of a doomed house and in the substitution therefor of the use of heredity. Heredity is the fate of our present-day existence, just as terrible and just as awe-inspiring to the modern atheist or scientist as ever the three sisters were to an ancient Greek. The most famous example of its utilization appears in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, but there are many other hardly less marked occurrences of it in modern drama. In *Ghosts* the real tragic spirit arises not from the pain and the suffering of the individuals alone, but from the realization in the minds of readers and audience that this is a curse that passes beyond the borders of the life and death of an individual, and that heredity has sway over all. In its purer form, of course, this theme could not often be treated without becoming tedious and monotonous; but it can be adapted in countless ways so as to appear in a disguised but not necessarily less potent shape. The two dramas mentioned immediately above, *The Tragedy of Nan* and *Snow*, have it suggested in a certain way, if not actually stated. The tragedy of *Nan* arises out of heredity, out of the curse laid, not by the gods but by society, upon an innocent girl. In *Snow* heredity is hinted at continually. Bronka's sister, we are told, ended her life tragically, and not only so, but precisely in the same manner as the heroine before us. At once we feel the connexion between the two,



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and thus appreciate subconsciously the relationship between the characters on the stage and forces beyond the theatre.

There are, of course, other methods of obtaining this feeling of universality. The means are literally innumerable by which dramatists ancient, Elizabethan, and modern have carried their plays out of the limitations of the actual and the particular to other planes of existence. Some of these means are intimately connected with the very source of the tragic spirit itself, such as that impression of waste which Professor Bradley has discerned in all the Shakespearian tragedy. This impression of waste gives power and dignity to the whole tragic impression in the presentation of the vastness of the universe. The chief methods, however, which appear to be most noticeable and most analysable have probably all been noted above.

Our investigation, therefore, of this aspect of tragedy has led us toward the realization of a truth that may be thus formally expressed : whenever a tragedy lacks the feeling of universality, whenever it presents merely the temporary and the topical, the detached in time and in place, then it becomes simply sordid. The cardinal element in high tragedy is universality. If we have not this, however well written the drama may be, however perfect the plot, and however brilliantly delineated the characters, the play will fail, and be classed with *Arden of Feversham* rather than with *Hamlet* and *Othello*.

### (ii) THE SPIRIT OF TRAGEDY

PITY AND TERROR.—This universality explains one thing about tragedy : it shows to us that part at least of the emotion which we gain from reading a great drama arises from the fact that we are led into contact with a series of events which themselves are related to the universe without.



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This, however, is only part of the emotion that comes to us. It is this question of the emotions aroused by tragedy that we may now consider in greater detail.

Aristotle has decided that the object of a tragedy is to arouse "pity and terror."<sup>1</sup> The theme of tragedy is always an unhappy one. It frequently introduces misery, torment physical and mental, and crime. The old mediæval notion of tragedy as a falling from prosperity to unhappiness has this general truth in it, that all tragedy of all nations has always had about it an element of pain and misery. There are two questions which here may arise : (1) Are "pity and terror" truly the emotions which a dramatist should seek to produce in a tragedy? and (2) If tragedy thus deals with misery what pleasure do we gain from it?

The answer to the second of these two questions obviously depends upon the answer which we shall find for the first, and therefore Aristotle's statement may have primary consideration. "Pity and terror"—we cannot quite be assured what Aristotle meant by these words, but, taking them at their ordinary English value, we may well meditate whether they express exactly the genuine tragic emotions. Terror, assuredly, is frequently called forth by a great drama, although terror is not the chief emotion in an audience; but as regards pity, we may truly feel doubtful whether in a high tragedy it may to any great extent enter in. Tragedy, after all, is not a thing of tears. Pathos stands upon a lower plane of dramatic art, just as sentimentalism is lower than a genuine humanitarian spirit. Pathos is closely connected with pity, and neither is generally indulged in by the great dramatists as the main tragic *motif*. The air of Æschylus is stern and hard. The characters he has introduced are above us, mentally and morally, because of their loftiness

<sup>1</sup> On Aristotle's words and on the *κάθαρσις* which tragedy effects see Butcher's *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, pp. 240 ff.

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and their nobility ; and we may hardly express pity for what we feel is loftier and nobler than ourselves. We can pity a man or an animal, but we cannot pity a god. There is no call for "sympathetic tears" toward Prometheus or Orestes, precisely because in the grandeur of their being they are greater than we are. We do not sympathize with Othello to the extent of feeling pity, because Othello is a force beyond our ken, primitive perhaps, but strong and majestic. We do not weep at the death of Cordelia, because she has a power and a firmness in her nature which defy our analysis.

If we take, then, the great tragedians by themselves—Æschylus, Shakespeare, Alfieri, Ibsen—or study individual works of theirs we shall be struck by this firmness and hardness in their characters and their plays. There is always something stern and majestic about the highest tragic art.

With Shakespeare we do sometimes descend to pathetic scenes, and it is exceedingly difficult to determine whether this is due to that spirit existing in the early seventeenth century which gave rise about 1608 to the romantic tragicomedies of Beaumont and Fletcher, or whether it is because Shakespeare felt the necessity of pathos both as a species of relief from too high tension and as a kind of contrast to the genuine tragic sternness. After the misery and horror of Lear's wandering on the storm-swept heath, after Gloucester's eyes have been torn out *coram populo*, we suddenly find ourselves borne into that scene of essential pathos when the aged king awakens to discover his daughter bending over him. That would appear to be almost the only passage in *Lear* where Shakespeare has deliberately striven to arouse our pity and our feelings of tenderness. All is as rock around ; this one scene forms a relief to the tremendous effect of the preceding acts and a moment of respite ere we pass to the even more tremendous conclusion. Magnificent passage though it be, artistically conceived and placed, it is nevertheless,

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when considered alone, seen to be on a lower plane of tragic expression than the rest of the play. The same phenomenon may be studied in Shakespeare's other dramas. Desdemona, weak and uninteresting, is made an object for our pity : in *Hamlet* the mad scene of Ophelia is pathetic in its aim. Both the pathos of Desdemona and the pathos of Ophelia form reliefs to the tragic tension of the dramas in which they appear.

Considering thus the relations between genuine tragic expression and pathos, we can well realize why there is such a chasm between the serious plays of 1630-40 and the tragedies of Shakespeare, and why modern plays such as *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* fall below the level of the highest art. Some of these dramas are excellently constructed, magnificent in their technique ; but the appeal in them is directed to the softer parts of our natures. One wonders whether this truth regarding tragedy was not in reality truly divined by the classic and the neo-classic critics when they fought with all their strength against romantic colour and variety. Although the neo-classicists never expressed it in so many words, although they confused the issue by reference to the "ancients" and by the theory of imitation, they may have felt that the rules they devised would preserve for tragedy that sternness and that statuesque grandeur which romantic notions only too soon can destroy. The later romantic playwrights all spoil their work by neglecting this hardness of texture. Ford's plays are beautiful, but they are not high tragedies ; Coleridge's *Remorse* fails to thrill us, in spite of its dark caverns lit by one flaring torch and its prisons oozing forth mouldy damps. In our own age most of our dramatists are incapable of creating real tragedy because they lack the requisite grandeur of temper and aim. They may produce fine melodramas and brilliant pathetic pieces, but they will never succeed in writing plays which may be classed with those of Æschylus, Shakespeare, and Ibsen.

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Tragedy, then, we may say, has for its aim not the arousing of pity, but the conjuring up of a feeling of awe allied to lofty grandeur.

TRAGIC RELIEF. (a) *Heroic Grandeur*.—Up to this point we have considered only the aim of high tragedy so far as that aim affects its general spirit; it may now be fitting to turn from this spirit or aim to a consideration of what is usually styled the tragic relief. This forms the second of the two questions proposed at the beginning of this section. Tragedy, it is admitted, deals with pain, sometimes with vice, often with misery, often, if not necessarily, with death; whence, we may ask ourselves, can arise our pleasure in witnessing this pain and this desolation?

The first and undoubtedly the greatest reason for our pleasure derived from the witnessing of a painful drama, the prime tragic relief, is the presence in some one or other of the characters of a lofty nobility, a note of almost heroic grandeur. From the very spirit of the drama, then, comes a great part of the recompense for the terror and awe which thrill us. We gain pleasure in reading or in witnessing *Hamlet* from watching Hamlet's honesty and inherent goodness of soul. We see him baffled by circumstance, but we are willing to witness that because we know that his nobility, the inner goodness of his being, will triumph over evil and over death. So, too, with the figure of Cordelia. Cordelia dies; we might for a moment, in reading *Lear*, be tempted to question the necessity for her murder, but this thought will never come to us while we are seeing a theatrical performance of *Lear*, nor will it come to us if we read *Lear* aright. We do not think whether it is just or unjust that Cordelia should die. The question of justice does not affect us at all. For in comparison with Cordelia's self—with what she actually is—her death is as nothing. Death itself has ceased to be of moment.

Although the examples already given are both from

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Shakespeare we shall find that Shakespeare is by no means alone in thus presenting nobility of characterization as a tragic relief. The predominating feature of Greek drama is this high nobility and sublime tone. Orestes, Ædipus, Prometheus—all the outstanding persons of the Greek drama—are majestic in their heroic proportions. We have seen that they can excite no pity in their grandeur; on the contrary, their grandeur is so exaggerated that they seem to stand above us as demi-gods, with a nobility greater than the nobility of this earth. When we thus consider the persons of the Greek and of the Shakespearian tragedy it will at once be apparent that the heroic drama of Restoration England, ridiculous as it may be in characterization, simply exaggerates to an extreme degree the heroic note present in the persons of Æschylus and Shakespeare. We have already seen that this heroic tragedy had thus exaggerated the perfectly natural inner conflict of Shakespeare's heroes, turning it into a thing of love and honour; so here we find that Dryden's Almanzor and Montezuma are merely intensified portraits painted on the same lines as Othello and Ædipus. Although not one of those heroic tragedies ever rises to the height of pure tragic expression we may find that, as a class, the heroic drama will serve to point out many characteristics of true dramatic productivity. The heroic tragedy is but true tragedy carried to excess, with all its elements magnified and made more obvious.

(b) *The Feeling of Nobility*.—Here, however, arises an exceedingly serious and difficult problem. We have mentioned as heroic figures, in the Greek drama Orestes, and in the Shakespearian drama Macbeth. Both of these, in their several ways, commit atrocious crimes; and we find that this question of nobility must be considered in close connexion with the corollary question of morality. Morality is, after all, a word of no absolute meaning, varying from

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religion to religion, from race to race, from nation to nation, from age to age, from individual to individual. This is granted, perhaps, by nearly all but the extreme religionists of the various sects, but even with such an admission it cannot be denied that there are certain common instincts in humanity, partly derived from social conventions, by which we agree as to the righteousness and unrighteousness of definite actions, particularly those of a more violent character. Murder, for example, especially murder of one near to us, is commonly regarded with abhorrence by all ; and if that murder be presented in a tragedy, committed by the hero of the play, then the dramatist, if he is to preserve the dignity and nobility of his work, must first of all provide ample *motif* for the committing of the crime and display after or before it a feeling of intense shame and abhorrence. We have to feel, that is to say, that the playwright himself is imbued with what we may call the noblest feelings of the human heart. If he treats his theme merely as a fitting opportunity for the introduction of sensational incidents then his drama as a whole will be nauseous to us. The *Choephoræ* of Æschylus provides a fitting example of the higher treatment of such a theme. There the Greek dramatist has presented Orestes with continual doubt and horror in his mind. Orestes feels terror and detestation at himself before he murders Clytemnestra ; he feels horror as he moves toward his fell purpose ; after it has been carried out the Furies, half personifications of his own thoughts and emotions, goad him on to madness. The *motif* of his crime is excellently and fully represented : the crime, in spite of the *motif*, is engaged in with absolute terror and shame.

With a more modern and more sensitive audience even such a *motif* might not have appeared sufficient, and this, perhaps, was felt by Alfieri when he came to treat of the same theme. In his *Oreste* the hero dashes within the



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scene, mad with rage not so much against his mother as against Egisto. He plunges his sword into the breast of Egisto, but in his madness he also unwittingly slays Clitennestra. Blinded by his frenzy, he does not see what he has done ; and entering upon the stage with Pilade and Elettra he exults in the slaughter of his father's murderer : <sup>1</sup>

*Or.* Oh, perchè mesto,  
 Parte di me, se'tu ? non sai che ho spento  
 Io quel fellone ? vedi ; ancor di sangue  
 È stillante il mio ferro. Ah, tu diviso  
 Meco i colpi non hai ! pasciti dunque  
 Di questa vista gli occhi.

*Pil.* | Oh, vista Oreste,  
 Dammi quel brando.

*Or.* A che ?

*Pil.* Dammelo.

*Or.* Il prendi.

*Pil.* Odimi—A noi non lice in questa terra  
 Più rimaner : vieni . . .

*Or.* Ma qual ?

*El.* Deh, parla !  
 Clitennestra dov'è ?

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<sup>1</sup> A translation of the Italian is given at the foot of each page.

*Ores.* Oh, wherefore sad,  
 Thou sharer of my thoughts ? Knowest thou not  
 That I have slain him ? See ; the blood is yet  
 Dripping from my sword. Ah, thou hast not  
 Shared in my triumph ! Feast then thine hungry eyes  
 On this rich sight.

*Pyl.* That sight ! Orestes,  
 Give me thy sword.

*Ores.* For what ?

*Pyl.* Give me thy sword.

*Ores.* 'Tis here.

*Pyl.* List. In this land no longer can we stay.  
 Come . . .

*Ores.* But what ?

*Elect.* Oh, speak ! Pylades, speak !  
 Where is Clytemnestra ?



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*Or.* Lasciala : or forse  
 Al traditor marito ella arde il rogo.  
*Pil.* Più che compiuta hai la vendetta ; or vieni ;  
 Non cercar oltre . . .  
*Or.* Oh, che di'tu ? . . .  
*El.* La madre  
 Ti ridomando, Pilade. Oh, qual m'entra  
 Gel nelle vene !  
*Pil.* Il cielo . . .  
*El.* Ah, spenta forse ! . . .  
*Or.* Volte in se stessa infuriata ha l'armi ? . . .  
*El.* Pilade ! oimè ! . . . tu non rispondi ?  
*Or.* Narra ;  
 Che fu ?  
*Pil.* Trafitta . . .  
*Or.* E da qual mano ?  
*Pil.* Ah ! vieni . . .  
*El.* Tu la uccidesti.  
*Or.* Io parricida ? . . .  
*Pil.* Il ferro  
 Vibrasti in lei, senza avvederten, cieco

---

*Ores.* Let her be :  
 Perchance she lights that wretch's funeral pyre.  
*Pyl.* Thou hast more than ta'en revenge ; but come this way ;  
 Inquire not further . . .  
*Ores.* What is't thou say'st ? . . .  
*Elect.* Once more  
 I ask, my mother, Pylades ? Oh, what  
 A chill invades my heart !  
*Pyl.* The gods . . .  
*Elect.* She's dead ! . . .  
*Ores.* In maddened rage has she then slain herself ? . . .  
*Elect.* Pylades ! Ah me ! . . . thou answerest not ?  
*Ores.* Tell me ;  
 What is't ?  
*Pyl.* Stabbed . . .  
*Ores.* By whom ?  
*Pyl.* Come ; let us go . . .  
*Elect.* Thou hast killed her.  
*Ores.* I ? A parricide ? . . .  
*Pyl.* Thy sword  
 Has pierced her breast, as thou, unconscious, blind

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- D'ira, correndo a Egisto incontro. . . .
- Or.* Oh, quale,  
 Orror mi prende ! Io parricida ?—Il brando,  
 Pilade, dammi : io'l vo' . . .
- Pil.* Non fia.
- El.* Fratello . . .
- Pil.* Misero Oreste !
- Or.* Or, chi fratel mi noma ?  
 Empia, tu forse, che serbato a vita,  
 E al matricidio m'hai ?—Rendimi il brando,  
 Il brando ; . . . Oh, rabbia !—Ove son io ? che feci ? . .  
 Chi mi trattien ? . . . Chi mi persegue ? . . . Ahi ! dove,  
 Dove men fuggo ? . . . ove mi ascondo ?—O padre,  
 Torvo mi guardi ? a me chiedesti sangue :  
 E questo è sangue ; . . . e sol per te il versai.
- El.* Oreste, Oreste . . . Ahi, misero fratello ! . . .  
 Già più non ci ode ; . . . è fuor di se . . . Noi sempre  
 Pilade, al fianco a lui staremo . . .
- Pil.* Oh, dura  
 D'orrendo fato inevitabil legge !

- In thy rage, dashed upon Ægisthus. . . .
- Ores.* Oh, what  
 A fear enfolds me ! I have killed her ? That sword,  
 Pylades, give it me. I must . . .
- Pyl.* It shall not be.
- Elect.* My brother . . .
- Pyl.* Wretched Orestes !
- Ores.* Who calls me brother ?  
 Thou impious woman, perhaps, who hast to life  
 And to the murder of my mother saved me ?—  
 Give me that sword, that sword ; . . . Oh, Furies !—What  
 Have I done ? . . . Where am I ? . . . Who is by me ? . . . Who  
 Torments me ? . . . Oh, where, where shall I fly ? Where  
 Shall I hide my miserable self ? . . . My father !  
 Dost thou glare at me ? Thou asked'st blood ;  
 And here is blood ; . . . for thee alone I spilt it.
- Elect.* Orestes, Orestes . . . Oh, miserable brother ! . . .  
 He hears us not . . . his sense is gone. . . . Ever must we,  
 Dear Pylades, stand by his side. . . .
- Pyl.* Cruel  
 Inevitable law of fearful destiny !

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This last scene is perfect in its restraint and in its power. It betokens not only the genius and the nobility of Alfieri's thought and character, but shows how the theatre will always adapt itself to the needs and desires of the different ages. The treatment of *Æschylus* was the treatment of a Greek; putting ourselves back in the ancient world, we can appreciate its nobility and its grandeur; but, as Alfieri felt, it is a treatment not precisely fitted for the world of to-day.

From these two plays of *Æschylus* and Alfieri we might turn to the cognate drama of *Sophocles*, where at once we see a decided weakening of tone. Whereas *Orestes* in the other two plays had been filled with shame and remorse, here he displays no horror at the deed he has committed. The construction is skilful, the characterization is fine; but the feeling of nobility is absent, and the play of *Sophocles* descends dangerously near to that fatal rock in dramatic art, sensationalism. In exactly similar manner may be compared the two tragedies of *Medea* written by *Euripides* and *Seneca* respectively. By *Euripides* *Medea* is coarsely drawn; she has not that high sublimity and that heroic grandeur which is so noticeable in the creations of *Æschylus*; but, at the same time, the Greek dramatist has endeavoured by all means in his command to excite for her the sympathies of the audience. She is a lonely woman, a woman suddenly cast into affliction. All her primitive furies are awakened, and the deed which she commits seems to flow from a natural cause. We may say that the *Medea* of *Euripides* is a slightly sentimental creation, but in her is expressed a nobility, a primitive nobility, where crude horror at her own crime mingles with her hate and with her desire for revenge. We turn to the *Medea* of *Seneca* and at once we discover that we have to deal with an entirely different being. *Medea* here is nothing more than a melodramatic villainess. We

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seek in her in vain for any truly noble element. Thrills we get, horror and dismay are cast upon us, but nothing that would show that the Roman author felt the terror of her crime. Seneca fails in the highest test.

There is hardly any necessity to refer here to Shakespeare. He, too, has chosen his villain heroes, but in every one of them there is depicted a high nobility. Macbeth sins doubly, trebly :

He's here in double trust :

First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,  
Strong both against the deed ; then, as his host,  
Who should against his murderer shut the door,  
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan  
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
Will plead like angels trumpet-tongued against  
The deep damnation of his taking-off . . .<sup>1</sup>

Everywhere he sees the horror of his deed. It makes him start with terror when he first conceives it ; it gives him visions of blood-smeared daggers as he goes about his fatal purpose ; it sears all the rest of his days with the thought-stains of conscience.

There is something of horror, perhaps, that stays the hand of the hesitating Hamlet. He accuses himself of cowardice ; "religion," he says, retards him. He cannot stab this drunken king in cold blood. Othello, too, sees all the hideousness of his murder ; he feels "the pity of it," and slays Desdemona with heroic terrors gnawing at his heart. It is "the cause," not a selfish jealousy, that nerves him to smother his wife. In killing her he kills himself :

Put out the light, and then put out the light !

Nowhere in Shakespeare's genuine work is there a loss of this high morality, this feeling for all that is best

<sup>1</sup> *Macbeth*, Act I, Scene VII.

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and most lofty in the human conscience, except perhaps in those monster daughters who mar the greatness of the tragedy of *Lear*, mere stage villainesses lacking vitality, with the strings on their puppet-shoulders all too clearly seen.

This is not a question of didacticism. None of the great dramatists have preached, though all indirectly have been stern moralists. Æschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Racine, Alfieri, Ibsen—all are alike in sharing a certain aloofness. They stand apart from, never descend into, their creations. On the other hand, although all of these have seen the triviality of the lesser ‘poetic justice’ which led astray so many of the minor playwrights, and although they all present in some way or another their realization of the narrowness of that conception of tragedy which makes death a punishment and life a reward, nevertheless they have all indicated in general outlines a broader and a grander justice. *Lear*’s sufferings, for example, in one way may be regarded as the punishment meted out for his pride, but the misery which falls upon him is out of all proportion to his fault, and in his suffering he is made to rise to a new nobility. *Lear* was never more a king, says a critic, than when he stood shorn of the outward trappings of royalty and enhaloed with that fresh majesty which became a man. Cordelia, too, suffers for her pride, but before her also a new world is opened in her suffering. Again, it is only after the murder of Duncan that Macbeth understands the sadness of life, realizes the uselessness of all he has done, sees, by contrast with the sere and yellow leaf, all the beauty and the grandeur he has abandoned. Death for him is no punishment; his punishment has already come. In a general sense, therefore, we may say that *Lear* and *Macbeth* are didactic plays, but not in the way that Lillo’s *The London Merchant* or Holcroft’s *The Road to Ruin* are didactic. Herein truly lies the reason

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why all great tragedies present a problem, but never give a solution. We are faced in them with terror, awe, nobility, suffering idealized ; the problem is given to us, but the solution remains. Although we feel that the great dramatist, such as Shakespeare or Æschylus, as opposed to Seneca, is on the side of the noble, on the side of the good, he never deserts his mission of creative artistry to descend, through his characters or *in propria persona*, to preach a moral or a lesson. He leaves that part to the minor writers, or to those who, misled by false theory, find no art valuable but such as serves a didactic purpose. The elusiveness of Shakespeare is simply the elusiveness of high art ; it is not a characteristic peculiar to himself ; he shares it with pre-Christian Greece and with modern Europe.

(c) *The Sense of Universality*.—From the nobility of the characters and from the implied, though never directly stated, moral aim comes the greater part of the tragic relief ; but this is not all. Part, too, comes from that very sense of universality which has been stated to be the fundamental characteristic of all high tragedy—some form of contact with infinity. If we are religious we shall say it is a contact with forces divine ; if we are atheistic we shall say it is a contact with the vast, illimitable forces of the universe. Everywhere in high tragedy there is this sense of being raised to loftier heights. In older drama it had naturally a more distinctly religious note ; in modern drama it will more probably tend toward the introduction of scientific forces—evolution, racial characteristics, heredity, even of abstract social forces and convention. Just as *Ghosts* is a tragedy of heredity, so *The Tragedy of Nan*, which also, as we have seen, touches on the same theme, is largely a drama of social conventions. Many modern tragedies depend not on certain personalities presented in isolated surroundings, but on individuals placed in the midst of social powers from which they derive their

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joys and their sorrows. We may have plays where the whole *motif* is drawn from such a source. *A Doll's House* is one; *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* is another. Here the personalities are set in the peculiar circumstances which cause the tragic development of the plot because of their contact with, and their reaction to, the rules and the codes of their society.

This use of universality as a means of tragic relief, at once raising and making trivial the actual emotions of the characters before us, is almost indistinguishable from that sense of waste which, as we noted, is most marked in the dramas of Shakespeare. We feel that if nature thus can waste what is good and precious and beautiful, if without a tear it can cast off Cordelia and Hamlet and the ill-starred lovers, then the misery and the pain has some symbolic value of which we are unaware, and the beauty of the universe is richer than we dreamt. The most powerful tragic dramatists by their strength and by their sternness appear in union with the vast forces of nature, and the very presence of their minds above and beyond the play and its characters gives us comfort and recompense and relief.

(d) *Poetical Effect*.—There are, besides, other elements in high tragedy which serve to take from the utter darkness of the story unfolded before us. There is the presence of the creative artistic power of the dramatist himself, and, particularly in the Greek and Elizabethan plays, the rhythm of the verse, to reave away our minds for a moment from the gloomy depths of the tragedy. A more detailed consideration of the use and of the value of verse in tragedy we may leave till later, but here it may be observed that verse in many cases acts as a kind of anæsthetic on our senses. The sharp edge of the pain is removed in the plays of Æschylus and Shakespeare, and though it becomes more poignant in some ways, yet it is reft of its crudeness and sordidness by the beauty



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of the language. This effect of verse is obviously lacking in the prose realistic plays which appeared in such numbers during the nineteenth century. We may not condemn these prose dramas, many of them among the masterpieces of the world's art, but perhaps the ultimate value and even necessity of verse in high tragedy is indicated by them.<sup>1</sup> Not only do they seem to lack something which is present in the blank-verse dramas and in the lyrical tragedies of past ages, but in themselves they appear continually to be straining toward what is for them a perfectly illegitimate semi-poetic utterance. Sometimes this endeavour to pass from pure prose levels is successful, but more often it clashes rather pitifully with the general atmosphere of the play, as in Masefield's *The Tragedy of Nan*, where the old gaffer seems disassociated from the other characters in the tragedy. The same disharmony is present also in the figure of the Nurse in Przybylszewski's *Snow*. This endeavour, unconsciously practised, indicates and registers a dissatisfaction on the part of the dramatists with the peculiar medium they have adopted. Just as in the novels of Dickens or in Kingsley's *Westward Ho!*, when the theme takes on a deep colouring of passion, the writers have fallen into a spurious half-rhythmic movement, so in these prose dramas, unless in the hands of the absolute genius, there are frequent lapses from what is the true spirit of the play.

(e) *Malicious Pleasure*.—One other reason for the pleasure we receive from witnessing or from reading a tragedy must be briefly glanced at. It is the reason commonly adduced by the psychologists—the primitive pleasure we gain from watching the pain of others.<sup>2</sup> This, naturally, in its crudest form, unless in certain peculiarly

<sup>1</sup> In his essay on *Tragedy* Dr Smart comes to the same conclusion: "It seems to follow that tragedy in its most perfect form is poetical, and that the greatest tragic works are poems" (p. 27).

<sup>2</sup> The chief exponent of this view is perhaps Émile Faguet.

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minded individuals, has now been lost; but possibly there exists in us sufficient of the savage to make us take a kind of unconscious delight in witnessing the sorrows of a Hamlet or of an Othello. The very fact that we can see how Othello is being hoodwinked, how Hamlet is losing his opportunities, gives us a strange thrill of pleasure. We realize that, great and noble and majestic as these heroes may be, we have the better of them in one way at least. We stand for a moment alongside the dramatist-creator, and smile at the puppets. Possibly there is not much of this in our pleasure at witnessing a tragedy, but unless there were an element of it we probably could not bear to see a play of misery through. We have long passed the stage when real pain in others might be a laughable thing, when a fierce delight could come from watching another's distress; but perhaps in the world of the theatre, where we know that the figures are unreal, we retain enough of the spirit of the boy who loves to see a butterfly feebly struggling on a pin, or of the savage who has not an atom of pity for his conquered enemy, to gain a secret and an unacknowledged pleasure from what are truly our most primitive emotions.

This reason, however, deeply rooted as it may be and capable of highly intricate psychological investigation, seems to fade into insignificance when placed alongside the major and fundamental causes. We may explain by it to some extent the fact that we do not shrink from the pain and from the misery of tragedy, but tragedy will never rise above purely sordid levels unless it has firmly stressed one or other of the aspects and qualities dealt with above; and the highest tragedy, that of Æschylus and of Shakespeare, will display all four characteristics: the grandeur of spirit and of character, the universality of the emotions, the rich rhythm of the verse, and the sense of noble purpose and lofty morality.

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## (iii) STYLE

THE LYRICAL ELEMENT IN TRAGEDY.—On account of its importance, although it has come up in connexion with the spirit of tragedy, we have left the problem of style to be treated by itself. In dealing with it we must always bear in mind that this problem of style is intimately related to the problems of action, of conflict, and of tragic relief.

A glance at the origin and development of tragedy may help us here toward a solution. The drama in Greece rose out of a song; in England it was nearly related in origin to a religious chant. As it has progressed both in ancient days and in Elizabethan England, there has clung to it a certain strain of lyricism, which expresses itself at times through the actual dialogue, at times breaks into more formal melody. "The Greek tragedy," says Coleridge, "may be compared to our serious opera," and opera in truth is but the extreme development of what is inherent in nearly all forms of tragic development. In England, when men as yet were ignorant of classical example, the serious mysteries tended to assume lyric measures; later, when the drama developed in the hands of Marlowe, Shakespeare, and the later Elizabethans, blank verse was taken over as the inevitable medium for tragic expression. Song, moreover, was continually introduced, and this has appeared as a handmaid to tragedy in almost all the succeeding centuries.

The origin of tragedy was a song; its development has been along lyrical lines. In viewing this, may we not well ask ourselves whether lyricism, the singing strain in some form or another, is not the necessary medium for all true tragedy? Our query may take the form of a double question: is this lyrical element in Greek and in early English tragedy something that the playwrights have felt to be necessary, something that truly has an intimate

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relationship with the inner core of the tragic spirit, or is it the mere traditional remnant, conservatively retained, of the source of the species, something that no one has had the courage to fling off even after it had served its legitimate purpose and had become useless? Lyricism was preserved in Greek drama not only in the dialogue but even in the strophes, anti-strophes, and epodes of the chorus; but may this not have been an element retained, like the chorus itself, because of religious prejudice? Shakespeare has kept a lyrical element in his blank verse and in the songs which he occasionally introduces; but may not this again be due to the conventions inherited from the days of the mysteries and strengthened by Renaissance enthusiasm for the example of the ancients?

Before we come to answer these questions directly, a further glance at the history of this lyricism in tragedy may not be inopportune. It is evident that the Elizabethan dramatists struck a mean, adhering to the new blank verse brought from Italy by the Earl of Surrey, a type of verse rhythmical in utterance, yet nearer to the language of real life than any species of verse of the riming type. With occasional lapses into decasyllabic couplets here and there, and with the infrequent introduction into the dialogue of poetic forms such as the sonnet (as in *Romeo and Juliet*), blank verse dominated the whole of tragic endeavour in England from Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc* to Shirley's *The Traitor* and *The Cardinal*. As drama advanced, however, there may be observed two reactions to this employment of blank verse. In the rimed couplets and in the heightened style of our own late seventeenth-century heroic tragedy, and in the rime of the French drama, we may trace an attempt to increase the lyrical element, although at the same time to restrict the true lyric note by an exaggerated decorum and a false regularity of expression. This increased lyrical element

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is to be seen still further developed in the plays produced in Spain under Calderon ; there the measures are not so monotonous as those of Dryden or Racine, and the song quality is, as a consequence, more in evidence. Opposed to this there is to be discovered a development toward the opposite extreme. In the verse of Fletcher and his companions we can trace a sense of dissatisfaction with the Shakespearian blank verse, an endeavour to work back to the language of ordinary life, where "the pitch of poetry," in the words of Symonds, has been lost. Still more revolutionary were the prose dramatists. The verse of *Arden of Feversham* is continually breaking down from the levels of poetry, and the tendency marked in this play was caught up by the bourgeois dramatists of the eighteenth century. Lillo set the fashion with *The London Merchant*, and his example was followed by Moore and Holcroft in England, by Diderot and others in France, by Lessing and Kotzebue in Germany, and by Ibsen and Strindberg in the North, until prose was established as one of the chief media for the expression of modern serious drama.

The question, then, before us takes a slightly altered form : it is not merely a decision between verse and prose that is demanded, but a choice of one of three media—rimed or excessively lyric measures, blank verse, and pure prose.

BLANK VERSE AND RIME.—As regards the first two little need be said. Except perhaps for certain particular types of drama, rimed verse appears too far removed from actual life to be a suitable medium for tragedy. The development of the drama in Greece is highly instructive here. The chorus, which, because of the origin of the Athenian stage, was retained as an integral part of the structure of his plays by Æschylus, was in the hands of Sophocles and Euripides gradually driven out of the scheme of tragedy. With the last-mentioned playwright, indeed, the chorus became

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merely the medium through which was presented to the audience a series of often detached and independent songs. Had any other great dramatists arisen after his time it is highly probable that the chorus would have been still further degraded, and that the dialogue would have stood by itself. The development of Shakespeare's tragic productivity proceeds on lines strictly analogous to those taken by the Greek drama as a whole. Exaggerated lyricism in his art is a sure sign of youthful workmanship; in the later and greater tragedies the language is brought as near to real life as the requirements of the blank verse will allow.

Racine, certainly, and Calderon have succeeded to some extent in expressing high emotions through the medium of rimed verse, but generally their efforts may be regarded as mere *tours de force*. The Restoration drama, even in the hands of a genius such as Dryden, fails not only because of its exaggerated emotions, but because of its tinkling dialogue. There are beautiful masques in rime, but the masque after all never rises to the dignity of high tragic expression. Tragedy must always have some close relationship to life; if we remove it overfar from worldly existence it ceases to thrill us with a sense of awe and of grandeur. The *Prometheus Unbound* of Shelley is a beautiful dramatic poem, but it could never, because of its intense lyrical note, startle and surprise us like *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Blank verse is rhythmical; it allows of the expression of the most poetical of thoughts; and yet, because of its structure, it remains close to real life. In hearing it we are not startled by the artificiality of the expression. In blank verse we hear the language of ordinary life rarefied and made more exalted. In the choice between it and rimed verse, therefore, we may unhesitatingly decide for the former, declaring that an undue lyrical element is unfitted for the expression of the highest tragic spirit; but the decision between verse as a whole



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and prose as the most suitable medium for tragedy remains to be taken.

BLANK VERSE AND PROSE.—It may be best to put forward here a dogmatic statement and then to consider several reasons that may be adduced to prove its soundness. In general, it may be said, it would appear that the Elizabethan dramatists were right in employing verse in their tragedies, and that the more modern prose development is uninformed, an experiment dangerous and antagonistic to the spirit of high tragedy.

That which is appealed to most in a tragedy is the emotions. Tragedy does not often direct itself to the intellect as such ; it deals always with the deepest moments of human feeling. There are few tragedies of pure thought ; even *Hamlet*, which is more philosophical than the majority of the Elizabethan dramas, has emotion constantly threading the intellectual framework of Hamlet's character. It has been proved, however, by the practice of long ages and of diverse races, that the emotions invariably find their fittest literary expression in rhythmical form. There is a certain natural melody in passion of any kind, and tragedy, in dealing with the passions, will therefore find its true utterance in rhythmical words. It is possible here, perhaps, to make an exception for some modern plays in which the emotional element seems to be continually and consistently repressed, and where consequently prose might be considered a more fitting medium. We could not, for example, very well picture *Strife* in verse form as it stands : but even here not very much can be said for non-rhythmical utterance in serious drama. Prose undoubtedly drags the play in which it appears down overfar into the levels of ordinary life ; and even in dealing with such a theme as *Strife* it is to be considered whether the dramatist would not have been well advised to lift his whole conception above these restricting



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levels. Hardy's *The Dynasts* is an example of a similar theme created on a broader plan, the actuality of the forces being lost in deeper and richer considerations. *Strife* is an interesting drama, but it is not high tragedy. It never thrills us like the great masterpieces of theatrical art; and that, it would appear, is due almost entirely to its excessive actuality, to its refusal to express those broader truths, those ultimate ideas, which dominate all great tragedy.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF RHYTHM.—As a means of raising the events of a drama above the levels of real life, then, and as the natural expression for emotion, verse claims the close attention of every tragic dramatist. Before he casts off verse, possibly because of some hastily conceived critical theory, he must consider well whether verse be not one of the necessary and integral parts of true drama, or at least whether in abandoning verse he will not have to give to his drama other serious qualities as a recompense for its loss. Verse, too, has other forces. The figment of the music of the spheres has at least a symbolic truth about it. Through rhythm and melody we seem to reach some universal chords of human feeling. By mere rhythm alone we certainly touch vibrations otherwise impossible of realization. A foreign prose work may be unintelligible to us, but a foreign symphony will be interpreted by us as easily as by a native of the land that gave it birth; and even a foreign poem, well recited, may awaken feelings and emotions in our hearts beyond the unintelligibility of the words. Rhythm, after all, is a common heritage; it strikes deep at primeval and general instincts of mankind. It is, moreover, not confined to man; it is universal to the whole of nature. The songs of the birds possess a melody pleasurable not only to themselves but to humanity. There are symphonies of sounds and of colours appreciated by the entirety of the natural world. Such a consideration of the

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force of verse obviously leads us back to our primal consideration of universality. Herein lies one other main means of securing the broader atmosphere demanded by tragedy. Verse will aid not only in removing tragedy from the levels of actual life, but in giving to it that universality demanded by the highest art.

VERSE AS A TRAGIC RELIEF.—Finally, verse may be considered as a species of tragic relief. This, in the section devoted to the spirit of tragedy, has already been tentatively hinted at. It may here be formally stated that verse undoubtedly takes away some of the horror and the gloom and the despair of the tragic spirit. Again a return must be made to that word ‘sordid.’ When we speak of a sordid tragedy we do not refer so much to the subject-matter as to the treatment of the subject-matter, to the lack of something which may take away part of the pain. Verse, introducing that melody which is but symbolic of a higher and more universal symphony, this quality of lyricism, is probably among the greatest of the relieving media. After all, the story of *Othello*, if it were told in plain prose, would be but a sordid story of a faithful wife and a deceived husband ‘avenging his honour’; *Hamlet* would be but a sordid tale of a murdered king and a semi-incestuous attachment. The lyricism, however, with which these plays are invested helps to raise them above the level of actuality, and to relieve the horror which otherwise we should feel in them. When *Othello* comes to the height of his jealous hate and enters staggering and blind with passion, Iago looks at him, and his words take on a gorgeousness of colouring that is surely intentional on Shakespeare’s part :

Not poppy, nor mandragora,  
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,  
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep  
Which thou owedst yesterday.

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The poetry is not strictly in accord with Iago's character, although Shakespeare may have had a purpose here, too, but it is in accord with the genuine tragic *motif*. It is a rush of music to still the horror and pain the scene might otherwise have aroused in our hearts. If we can but imagine in the place of these lines of poetry a sneer of Iago's cynicism we may be able to appreciate their value and force. Possibly for the same reason may have been introduced that remarkable speech of Iachimo in Act II, Scene II, of *Cymbeline* :

'Tis her breathing that  
Perfumes the chamber thus : the flame o' the taper  
Bows toward her, and would under-peep her lids,  
To see the enclosed lights, now canopied  
Under these windows, white and azure laced  
With blue of heaven's own tinct. . . .

On her left breast  
A mole cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops  
I' the bottom of a cowslip.

Shakespeare probably realized that the situation he had devised—the innocent girl lying in her bed, the cunning Iachimo issuing from his trunk—was both improbable and horrible. It was horrible because of the meanness and the duplicity shown in it; it was improbable because of the sudden heavy sleep of Imogen, necessary for the development of the plot, but distinctly unnatural. To counter both, to attract the attention of the audience and to allay their suspicions and their disgust, he bursts into lyrical utterance, sacrificing character for the sake of dramatic effect. The same phenomenon may, of course, be discovered in many other dramatists apart from Shakespeare. The Greek dramatists knew of the device, and many of their most poignant and most terrible scenes are clad in the richest of their poetry. In later days Otway, when dealing with a particularly terrible theme in *The Orphan*, contrived thus to

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soften and relieve the pain he had aroused. The last scene of the fourth act, when Monimia learns the truth from Polydore, is the most poetical of his tragedy, and the fifth act opens with a song.

In dispensing with verse, therefore, the adherents of the prose realistic drama appear to be abandoning a legitimate method of securing atmosphere and of giving pleasure. Verse is seen to be not merely a traditional remnant of choral song or cathedral chant; it is something closely connected with the inner spirit of tragedy itself. If verse and the opportunity for securing lyricism be neglected then other qualities must be deeply stressed in an endeavour to atone for the loss. Occasionally it is not possible so to stress these other qualities; often their introduction seems unnatural and strained. The ordinary prose tragedy fails partly because of a lack of melody, partly because prose, by its very nature, prohibits the introduction of many of those features which in the poetic drama seem but natural and just.

### (iv) THE TRAGIC HERO

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HERO.—So far, attention has been paid to the final aim, to the medium and spirit of tragedy; there remains the question of that which is commonly the means by which the dramatist expresses both aim and spirit—the tragic hero.

It is to be observed that commonly tragedy differs from comedy in selecting some one or two figures who by their greatness and by their inherent interest dominate the other *dramatis personæ*. There may be comedies where one figure so absorbs all, or nearly all, the attention of the audience, but such comedies are both rare and inclined to approach toward more serious realms. We have, for example, some of the plays of Molière, *L'Étourdi* and *Le Misanthrope*

especially, and the *Volpone* of Ben Jonson. A close analysis of the atmosphere of these comedies, however, would reveal the fact that they are slightly abnormal.<sup>1</sup> They appeal not only to the risible faculties, but to the more serious part of our being as well. They draw near, that is to say, the dominion of the tragic spirit. Normally, comedy of any kind depends upon interplay of character, where no one person is of so much more importance than another that he becomes a solitary hero. This fact will be made more evident by comparing the interest of the tragedies and comedies written by Shakespeare, as typical of Elizabethan output, and by Otway, as typical of Restoration productivity. In *Hamlet* the hero stands well-nigh alone; in *Lear* it is the king and Cordelia who absorb nearly all the attention; in *Othello* it is the Moor and Iago; in *Macbeth* it is the thane and his wife. It is not that the other characters are badly drawn, but they are, from the point of view of construction, given hardly any important speeches, and, from the point of view of characterization, placed on a level far below the principal figures. A reference to Shakespeare's comedies marks the completely different conception. Take *Much Ado about Nothing*, in which there are Claudio and Hero, Benedick and Beatrice, Leonato and Antonio, Dogberry and Verges; or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where there are the two pairs of lovers—Lysander and Hermia, Demetrius and Helena—the fairies Oberon and Titania, and the artisans Bottom, Quince, and their company. We note here not only that the characters are more on a level, none assuming importance far above the others, but that there are various quite distinct points of dramatic interest. The tragedies, on the other hand, are simpler and more concentrated. Otway's plays present much the same features. In *Venice Preserv'd* we have as the centre of interest Pierre, Jaffier, and Belvidera,

<sup>1</sup> See *infra*, pp. 145 ff.

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all the other characters being subordinate to them ; in *The Orphan* the attention is thrown exclusively on Polydore, Castalio, and Monimia. *The Souldier's Fortune*, on the other hand, has Captain Beaugard and Courtine and Sylvia, Sir Davy and his wife, Sir Jolly Jumble and the servant Fourbin ; *The Atheist* has old Beaugard, his son and Porcia, Courtine and his wife, Daredevil the atheist, Theodoret and Gratian. While in tragedy, then, the interest is placed on one or two main characters, in comedy it is distributed over a body of diverse figures. It is because of this that we may discuss in such detail the character of the hero or the heroine in tragedy, whereas in comedy such a discussion would lack not only value, but meaning. Tragedies often are called after the name of the one chief figure—*Ædipus* and *Medea* of Greek times, *Hamlet*, *Lear*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* of Shakespeare, *The Orphan* and *The Cenci* of later days—comedies hardly ever. It is the hero who gives significance and tone to a tragedy.

THE TRAGIC FLAW.—In considering this tragic hero we may begin again with Aristotle. Here the Greek critic has been more explicit than he was on the former subjects already dealt with. The tragic hero for him is “a person neither eminently virtuous or just, nor yet involved in crime by deliberate vice or villainy, but by some reason of human frailty [*δι' ἀμαρτίαν τινά*].” That is to say, the tragic hero, while not a paragon of goodness, must in Aristotle's opinion have noble qualities in him, but he must have at the same time some flaw in his being, derived either from ignorance of affairs beyond his knowledge or from human passion. Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, has proceeded to indicate a couple of lines of development<sup>1</sup> in the presentation of this hero, but his division is rather logical than strictly critical, and we may find the characteristics of the hero in tragic drama

<sup>1</sup> There is a third, but this seems hardly to lead toward tragedy.



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somewhat more extended, both in Greek and in modern works, than he has presented them.

UNCONSCIOUS ERROR.—There is, first of all, as Aristotle has noted, the hero who acts wrongly through an unconscious error. This is the human frailty (*ἀμαρτία*) derived from ignorance. The typical example (given in the *Poetics*) is the *Œdipus* of Sophocles. This conception of the hero is distinctly non-Shakespearian, although, in a modified form, it has been adopted by several English writers. It was a legitimate type in ancient Athens because of the religion of the time, but with the loss of that religion it appears slightly out of place and can be treated in modern times only with the greatest of care. A resuscitation of the hero who errs in ignorance is visible in the seventeenth-century drama just after the time of Shakespeare. It is very probable that this resuscitation was caused by the strange errors of the Beaumont and Fletcher romantic tragi-comedy, which often introduced characters who acted after the Greek model, although not often toward tragic ends. At the Restoration the type found a magnificent expression in *The Orphan*. Here one of the two heroes commits a deed of tragic import because of his ignorance of a certain set of facts, the only departure from the model of *Œdipus* being that the crime which the king committed was in itself an odious one, even allowing for his ignorance of the facts which made it truly tragic. The tragedy certainly arises from the fact that Polydore did not know that Monimia had married his brother Castalio, but the tragic act was not carried out wholly in ignorance. It was led up to by Polydore's lust, a genuine *ἀμαρτία*, and by Castalio's feigned libertinism. We have thus in *The Orphan* a play of two atmospheres or conceptions, the Greek idea being modified by the more modern element of direct human frailty, based not on a mere lack of knowledge. While dealing with

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this play, *The Orphan*, it may be noted in passing that this theme, generally thus modified, was distinctly popular at the time of the Restoration, and has appeared sporadically in later drama of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is responsible for all the 'Fatal Marriages' and 'Fatal Innocencies' of the period 1660-1700, just as it is responsible for the tragic motive of Lillo's *The Fatal Curiosity* in the mid-eighteenth century. One may expect to see its recurrence in an age that has lost some of the religious feeling that swayed the Elizabethans, although possibly the theme is too bitter and too poignant to permit of genuine tragic passion unless treated by the hand of a genius.

CONSCIOUS ERROR.—There is, besides this type, the hero who acts wrongly with conscious intent. Aristotle has noted this also, instancing the example of the *Medea*. Phædra in the *Hippolytus* of Euripides and the same character in the eponymous play of Seneca might also be adduced as similar figures from the Greek and Roman drama. This conception was adopted by Shakespeare and by many other Elizabethan dramatists. *Macbeth* has its villain hero; *Othello* has a similar central figure, although here the tragedy has characteristics of the first type as well. The crime of the Moor springs out of a conscious act, while, on the other hand, he was misled concerning the true facts of the case. In the presenting of a character of this stamp, as has already been pointed out, the playwright must in some way or another display clearly the horror and the detestation aroused by the crime committed. With the romantic dramatists this may be done by showing a change of character after the execution of the deed of violence, as in *Macbeth*. Perhaps Shelley had the same idea in mind when he presented the peculiar figure of Beatrice Cenci. With the classical playwrights, on the other hand, the abhorrence can be shown only immediately before or immediately after the

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crime, as in the Æschylean presentation of Orestes. But where there is no expression of horror and detestation, as in the *Hippolytus* of Seneca, the tragedy inevitably falls to a plane of lower and purely melodramatic creation, for tragedy, as we have seen, must not only thrill with the sense of awe, but must also uplift with the sense of majesty. It is possibly the absence of this essential which takes from our pleasure in reading or in seeing *The Cenci*. In spite of the loud praises of the Shelley-worshippers, it would appear that in this drama there is not that high feeling and nobility of soul which is present in the works of Sophocles and Shakespeare. Shelley fails as Ford fails, not for the same reasons certainly, but in a precisely similar manner.

THOUGHTLESS FOLLY.—Besides these, the types noted by Aristotle, there are several other sub-varieties of the tragic hero presented in the works of the great dramatists, ancient as well as modern. The Shakespearian type of hero who brings disaster on his own head through some thoughtless act which springs from his own character is scarcely provided for by Aristotle, and perhaps in its purest form does not make its appearance in the Greek drama at all. Lear hardly commits a crime, either consciously or unconsciously, but his rejection of Cordelia is an action that takes its rise directly from his own character and temper, and it is the immediate cause of his future sufferings. Coriolanus, in a similar way, passes to his ruin through his pride and his aristocratic contempt—failings that make him lose sight of all other human considerations. So, too, Antony is lost in his love and goes to destruction with a kiss on Cleopatra's lips. Perhaps the Oreste of Racine's *Andromaque* might be regarded from a cognate point of view.

IMPOTENCE AND AMBITION OF THE HERO.—Again, there is the hero who is faced by a task greater than his powers. Here we have, certainly, a 'human frailty,' but it is one

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that is expressed in wrongful action of no kind whatsoever. Hamlet is of the kin neither of Ædipus nor of Medea. We can realize that the web of tragedy which envelops him has been spun from his own personality, that his hesitation and delay have brought about an almost general catastrophe ; but he is not a villain in any sense of the word, and he does not actively precipitate the tragic action.

As a species of subdivision of what may be called the Hamlet type we find the heroes of Marlowe. In Marlowe's plays, certainly, the ambition of the protagonists brings about their ruin, but the basis of the tragic action appears to lie more definitely in the opposition of a human force of extraordinary dimensions to a force beyond it and more powerful than it. The doom of the hero is thus again brought about by a human frailty, the desire for knowledge or for "dominion infinite," but the tragedy of the play lies in the defeat of that desire by supernatural powers. By a slight change of stress from the typical Greek treatment of the theme, the Prometheus of Shelley's play approximates closely to this Marlowe type, and the Cain of Lord Byron has the same characteristics.

THE FLAWLESS HERO.—As a still further subdivision of the Hamlet type we get the hero who is presented in *Romeo and Juliet*. Here there is not an atom of dross. The love of Romeo is pure and passionate. He is loftier and nobler than his companions. He is in all ways an essentially good and honest character ; yet he comes to ruin. The reasons for his destruction lie in outward circumstance. There have been critics who have decided that there was here a fatal flaw, that Romeo and Juliet married without their parents' consent ;<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This view has been put forward by Gervinus. Dr Smart asserts that an innocent hero is not necessarily alien to tragedy. Among the examples he quotes are the Gospels and *Clarissa Harlowe*. Apart from the fact that both of these have moral or religious associations, it seems hazardous to argue from one type of literature to another.

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but this in our hearts we know to be false. Romeo and Juliet could have acted in no other way than they did. They are not in the position of Œdipus, ignorant of the meaning of their own actions; they go into their marriage with open eyes, but fate destroys the promise of their love. This type of hero, as Aristotle saw, was not generally suitable for tragedy.<sup>1</sup> We fail to sympathize with the ruthlessness of the doom meted out to the central figure; and it may be confessed that *Romeo and Juliet* is by way of being a *tour de force*, where the poetry and the vehemence of the youthful love-passion disarm and appease us. This tragedy of outward circumstance and this hero of inherent goodness may be ruled out of our survey of the fitting themes for high tragedy. Only occasionally has it been attempted by other dramatists, and never with success. It is because Don Alvar in Coleridge's *Remorse* is of such a type that this tragedy fails to grip us with a fitting emotion.

THE HERO SWAYED BY TWO IDEALS.—As a completely separate type, although one that has certain elements in common with the others already enumerated, might be taken the hero who is torn between two duties. This, to a certain extent, is but a variation of the hero who acts wrongly through some flaw in his own being, the only difference being that he is faced with two alternatives, neither of which is wholly bad, but of which one represents the power of common duty and law, and the other the power of passion and emotion. Here the tragic action may be brought about by a conscious or unconscious deed springing from some ἀμαρτία, but the interest of the play lies rather in the inner struggle between two desires or ideals in the mind of the hero than in the wrong action committed. This type is to be found in its crudest and most exaggerated

<sup>1</sup> It has been pointed out by Butcher that Antigone is largely flawless—ἐπιεικής, to use Aristotle's word.

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form in the heroic tragedy of the Restoration. However dull Dryden's dramas may appear, we realize that there are in his heroes the elements of tragic greatness. Examples are to be discovered likewise in the rimed tragedies of neo-classic France. The type dominates nearly all the *dramatis personæ* of Racine, sways the tragedies of Voltaire, and, carried thence, appears in almost every classical tragedy produced in England in the eighteenth century. In Shakespeare it is apparent in the conception of Antony, although a comparison of Shakespeare's drama with the cognate play of Dryden, *All for Love, or The World Well Lost*, will show how Shakespeare has humanized and softened the too sharp stress of the conflict, so heavily marked in the Restoration tragedy. This type of hero, obviously fitted to convey the highest tragic emotions, has been carried over to modern times, and, adapted to newer conditions, appears as noticeably now as it did in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

THE FLAW ARISING FROM CIRCUMSTANCES.—Finally, there is perhaps one other species of hero that might be considered, again a subdivision of the wrongly acting character. In this type the hero accepts a life of crime not because of some flaw in his being, but because of circumstances which operate harshly against him, and in his crime he remains honest and pure-souled. A typical example is to be discovered in *Die Räuber* of Schiller. Here Charles de Moor is driven to become an outlaw because of the action of his father, who in his turn has been cheated by the younger son, Francis de Moor. It is Francis who is the villain, who pursues Amelia and immures his old father in a dungeon. Charles becomes the instrument of vengeance, liberating his father and deciding at the close to give himself over to justice. As is obvious, this type owes something to the sentimental villain-heroes or 'good-bad' men of the eighteenth century, but in it the sentimental note is raised and purified. It is



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distinctly a modern conception, and, taken over by the romantic dramatists, also makes its appearance in a number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century plays.

THE POSITION OF THE HERO IN THE PLAY.—Before passing from these definite types of heroes, it may be noted that beyond their several varieties there are two very differing positions which any of these may hold in the plays in which they appear. Any of these heroes may be placed in a tragedy either in an active or an inactive capacity. There is, on the one hand, the hero who sways the whole course of the drama. Orestes thus dominates both the tragedies of *Æschylus* and of *Alfieri*; *Macbeth* is the motive force in *Shakespeare's* play. Here almost everything that happens on the stage arises out of the thoughts and the emotions of the hero himself. Hardly any other character may be said to influence the development of the plot. There is, on the other hand, the hero who, like *Lear*, is “more sinned against than sinning.” *Lear* gives the initial motive-power to the play in which he appears, but that first scene when he apportions his kingdom is almost a prologue, and in a non-romantic drama would assuredly have been told to the audience by narration. After it is over *Lear* is wholly acted against. The conduct of the piece passes entirely out of his hands into the hands of his daughters. This latter position of the hero has been but sparingly utilized by the greater dramatists, because of the sense it gives of the powerlessness of the hero himself. It was only a *Shakespeare* who could present a *Lear* majestic and exalted in the midst of his affliction and misery.

THE TWIN HERO.—One other consideration must also be touched upon. In some dramas, particularly of the Elizabethan period, there is not merely one hero, but two, and the tragic emotion arises out of the clash or conflict of their personalities. Who shall we say is the hero of

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*Othello*? Othello himself, until the very last act, does absolutely nothing; it is Iago who drives the plot forward and attracts nearly all the attention of the play. In this tragedy we seem to see indeed two chief figures: Iago by a terrible *ἁμαρτία* engaged in a grim game of deceit, and Othello by a different species of human frailty moving slowly onward to his destruction; this is not a mono-hero play such as is *Hamlet* or *Lear*. The same situation arises in *Venice Preserv'd* and in *The Orphan*. Jaffier and Pierre are both heroes, and the misery and the awe in the play arise out of both the weakness of the former and the ruthlessness of the latter. In *The Orphan* a tragic situation could not have been developed out of either Polydore or Castalio alone. It is when they are put in juxtaposition that they are brought to destruction and misery.

THE HEROLESS TRAGEDY.—This tragedy from the clash and conflict of two heroic personalities has seen a marked development, with many variations, in our modern period. With the passing away of the Elizabethan stress on character, noted above, there has been a tendency toward dramas lacking any apparent hero or heroes, where the tragic action and the tragic atmosphere spring rather from the conflict of diverse characters, none of which is a central figure, or from the social forces surrounding those characters. A hero (or heroes) is truly present, but it is a hero unseen. Who precisely is the hero of *Justice*? It is not the pitiful, weak-willed clerk; he, in himself, would not be tolerable for a moment in a tragedy. Who is the hero of *Strife*? It is neither the leader of the men nor the leader of the masters. There is not in either play one single figure, not one single pair of figures, which looms up sufficiently large to take predominating importance in our minds, and we have, therefore, no hero or heroes in the older sense of the word. The place of the hero is taken by an unseen force:

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the tragedy is not the tragedy of a person or persons, but the tragedy of a system. The chief protagonists are not men and women at all, but social conventions, abstract forces which move over and around the *dramatis personæ*. It is Strife that is the hero of *Strife*, and Justice that is the hero of *Justice*.

This tendency is visible everywhere in modern tragic productivity, not only in these definitely heroless dramas, but in those tragedies where some attempt has been made to present an outstanding central figure of some kind or another. In these latter there is nearly always evidenced a desire on the part of the dramatist to soften the sense of independent individuality. *Abraham Lincoln* is an historical play with one central figure, but Lincoln is carefully made into a symbol of something apart from himself. He is hardly a man as the Henrys and the Richards of Shakespeare were men; he is a force symbolized in a man. So *Mary Stuart*, in the hands of former dramatists, was a tragedy of personality. With Drinkwater it has become a drama of a particular class of temperament, symbolizing in the Scots queen a class ever at war with social forces and with social ideals whether in the sixteenth century, in ancient Egypt, or to-day. So obviously did Drinkwater desire to emphasize this point that he has not let this Mary Stuart drama stand by itself. The prologue has been introduced for no other purpose but to display the fact that Mary is connected in spirit with our own days, that she was no unique personality, but stands as a high symbol of a certain type of mind and of soul. Probably no clearer example could be found of the tendencies of present-day art and thought.

THE HEROINE.—This presentation of Mary Queen of Scots carries us to the question of the presentation in tragedy of the heroine. Already it has been noted that tragedy differs from comedy in being often almost entirely masculine. The use of the words masculine and feminine is, of course,

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fraught with peculiar difficulties, for they may refer not only to the sexes, but to the qualities which, in past centuries, have been associated with the sexes. Thus we may say that *Tamburlaine* is a purely masculine play because it introduces hardly any woman character; but at the same time we may say that *Macbeth* is masculine because, although Lady Macbeth is one of the main forces in the drama, she is not of that type of mind which we usually call feminine. The connotations of these words, obviously, have changed considerably during the last few generations, but, reservations being made, they may be utilized thus to signify spirits and temperaments of differing values.

Tragedy, it was said, differed from comedy in that it might often be wholly masculine; this statement might be carried still farther and take the form of a pronouncement that tragedy almost invariably stresses the masculine at the expense of the feminine elements. The reason for this is quite evidently the hardness and sternness which we have already noted in the highest tragic art. The central figure, then, of all great tragedies will be a man, or else a woman who, like Lady Macbeth or Iphigenia or Medea, has in her temper some adamant qualities and severity of purpose not ordinarily associated with the typically feminine. The feminine element, on the other hand, is rarely lacking in any great tragedy; its absence mars the dramas of Marlowe. This feminine element, however, does not often have any great influence on the development of the play directly, although indirectly, by influence on the mind of the hero, it may have much. Ophelia is thus a weak, wholly inactive character, yet it is evidently her death which changes Hamlet from a man of deep philosophy and of profound, if unrealized, purpose, into a careless creature, for whom nothing is of any consequence or interest. In the same way Desdemona plays no direct part in *Othello*; she is

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essentially feminine, weak, deceptive,<sup>1</sup> purposeless, and thus does not actively forward the plot. Only indirectly, by her influence upon Othello, does she carry on the tragic movement. Cordelia in *Lear* is of more importance, but she shares with Lady Macbeth certain qualities which we commonly call masculine; she is, in many ways, simply a replica (more hastily sketched in, it is true) of her father.

The corollary to this truth is seen in those dramas begun by Banks in the middle of the Restoration period and continued by Rowe and others in the eighteenth century. These 'she-tragedies,' as sometimes they have been called, have rarely an atom of tragic greatness, although some of them are affecting. *Vertue Betray'd, or, Anna Bullen* of Banks, *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* of Rowe, and *Mary, Queen of Scots* of St John, are all pathetic and touching, but they are not tragedies. They never reach that sternness of majesty which is an inevitable concomitant of this highest type of literature. It is this insistence on the feminine, and, along with the feminine, the pathetic, which has marred the plays of Fletcher, Webster, and Ford; it is partly this which takes away from the grandeur of *Venice Preserv'd* and *The Orphan*; it is this which has led several modern dramatists, misled by sentimental notions, hopelessly astray. The feminine in high tragedy, we may repeat, must either be made hard, approaching the masculine in quality, or else be relegated to a position of minor importance in the development of the plot. The only exception to this lies, possibly, in those heroless plays already referred to, where the tragedy arises not so much out of individual characters as out of the clash

<sup>1</sup> The word deceptive is deliberately employed here. For me the tragedy of *Othello* rises out of the deception and self-deception of the chief characters, and Desdemona, by her deception of her father, by her deception of her husband, and by her last pitiful deception of those who witnessed the final tragedy, stands related to the general atmosphere and purpose of the play.

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of varying temperaments and the operation of social or external circumstances; and even here the atmosphere of loftiness and hardness must be preserved.

### (v) TYPES OF TRAGEDY

FEATURES OF GREEK TRAGEDY.—In thus analysing the characteristics of drama from Æschylus to modern days, all the main types of tragedy have been touched upon. There would remain here, therefore, little more to do than to sum up some of the results which have been obtained, as these particularly apply to the tragic endeavour of the various ages. As practically none of the main types of tragic endeavour is unrepresented in English, it may be well to confine all remarks here to the development of tragedy in this country, with but occasional reference to the practice of other lands.

(a) *The Chorus*.—Of the Greek drama much has been said and written, and the details of its technique and development need not here be entered into. There is much that is permanent in the tragedies of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, but there is also much that has a purely temporary value. The chorus, for example, is essentially an incidental feature. It is part of the traditional origin of the Greek stage, and in the hands of Euripides it was, as we have already seen, relegated to a subordinate position. That it was not necessary for the expression of true tragic emotion has been proved not only by the romantic genius of Shakespeare, but by the classical genius of Racine. On the other hand, the chorus marked that lyrical quality in tragedy which later iconoclasts were inclined too recklessly to neglect. The spirit of the chorus, that of which it was the expression, is a permanent thing, well-nigh necessary in all high tragedy, but the form of the chorus is purely temporary and topical.

(b) *The Unity of Action*.—The unities, also, present



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features of a similar tendency. The unity of action, in its stricter sense, is absurd ; in its broader sense it is a rule from which no great dramatist may ever swerve. It is noticeable that all our greatest dramas have been, as it were, concentrated. The passion of *Othello*, the storm-like sweep of *Macbeth*, allow of hardly any incidentals. The emotion is pent into one small compass, and seems to gain strength and power therefrom. In general, we shall find that the romantic dramatists have eschewed to a large extent the violent use of sub-plot in tragedy ; when they did utilize it they generally failed. *Lear* is the only tragedy of Shakespeare where there is anything of a clearly marked under-plot of this description, and the play has been noted by the critics as being more epic than dramatic in structure, as being truly unactable on the stage. The sub-plot of marked individuality appears only in the romantic comedies and tragi-comedies of the Elizabethan era, and accords with the looser structure and the more diffused emotions (not truly tragic) of these dramas. The unity of action accords with the hardness, the restricted passion, and the concentrated emotion demanded by tragedy.

(c) *The Unity of Time*.—The unity of time has also its permanent importance. Ridiculous, certainly, are the disquisitions of those critics, Italian, French, and English, who strove to determine whether the action of a tragedy should be of three, or six, or twelve, or twenty-four hours. The literal application of the rules has no value for the modern stage, and had but a small value for the stage of the Greeks ; yet when Aristotle, in contrasting the epic with tragedy, stated that the latter “endeavours, as far as possible, to confine its action within the limits of a single revolution of the sun, or nearly so,” he was, indeed, delving deeply into the essentials of tragic composition. The Greek dramas are mostly thus confined, and even in Shakespeare’s plays we

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find at least an endeavour to cheat us into believing that the action is swift and tempestuous, to accord with the violent nature of the tragic emotion. In *Hamlet*, after the events of the two days embraced in Act I, Scenes 1 to v, there is actually an interval of a couple of months, as again there is a space of a week between Act IV, Scene iv, and Act IV, Scene v; but no spectator or reader feels this extension of time. *Hamlet* seems to move rapidly on from the first visitation of the ghost to the final catastrophe. If the intervals are realized they merely make the play appear like a tale told in a prologue (Act I), a set of three acts (II–IV), and an epilogue (Act V). *Othello* has a structure similar to that of *Hamlet*. Act I is confined to a day. Then comes the voyage. Acts II and III take up a couple of days, and then, after the interval of a week, there are Acts IV and V. Here again, however, in spite of the division into prologue, two acts, and epilogue, there is a swiftness suggested which makes us forget the actual time analysis. *Macbeth* and *Lear* are more extended, and in them, precisely because of this, we find a certain weakness not apparent in the other two tragedies. In *Macbeth* the interest is sustained at white heat up to the murder of Duncan, is carried on in a way till after the death of Banquo, and then rapidly declines, although Shakespeare by his poetry makes strenuous efforts to revive our flagging attention. The murder of Duncan occurs in Act II, Scene ii; Act II, Scene iii, is the scene of the discovery. Banquo is murdered in Act III, Scene iii, and his ghost appears in Act III, Scene iv. On studying such indications as Shakespeare has left to us of the time duration of this play, we find that a long interval occurs just after the death of Duncan and that thereafter there is a continual series of intervals throughout Acts IV and V. These intervals cannot be concealed by Shakespeare as he concealed those of *Hamlet* and of *Othello*, and our waning interest must

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in part be attributed to them. The structure of *Lear*, as we have seen, is inclined to be epic, and, as such, although when read it may have an added grandeur, yet when seen in the theatre it has not the effect of the other three. It is only when we come to the romantic tragi-comedies, however, that we get the really violent breaking of this unity. The long sixteen years' leap between the acts of *The Winter's Tale* would have been impossible in a high tragedy; it would have completely dispelled that closely concentrated emotion which it is the business of tragedy to present to us.

(d) *The Unity of Place*.—The unity of place has quite obviously more in common with the Greek than with the modern romantic stages, yet, again for the preservation of the peculiar atmosphere of tragedy, there must be but little shifting of scenery if we are to keep the true tragic spirit. To Shakespeare, on his bare and unadorned stage, change of place meant nothing; but for us to-day with our scene-shifters and our machinists the unity of place has a peculiar value. As long as our minds and our eyes are distracted from the genuine development of the play, so long will we fail to appreciate to the full the meaning and the emotion of the dramatist. Swift change of place suggests longer duration of time, and duration of time acts directly counter to the true tragic spirit.<sup>1</sup>

(e) *The Stage*.—The Greek drama and its conventions, therefore, may have much to tell us. Even from the conjectures of the most absurd of the neo-classic critics there may be gained genuine elements of dramatic truth. The main difference, however, between the Greek theatrical world and that of to-day does not lie in the chorus or in mere

<sup>1</sup> There is a certain tendency in very modern times to increase the stage settings. This may partly be attributed to the influence of the cinema, and has been warmly advocated by the futurist Marinetti. It may be noted that only the unities of action and time are mentioned by Aristotle.

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dramatic technique, but in the stage ; and a consideration of the Greek theatre, capable of holding 30,000 spectators, raises at once the problem as to the most suitable medium for the presentation of tragedy. On the one hand there is this vast amphitheatre, with the actors far removed from the audience, with no opportunity for scenic effects, and on the other there is the *théâtre intime*, where a small body of spectators is brought into close contact with the actors, and where scenic effects can be employed and illusions of all kinds created. The true answer to this problem would seem to be that both the *théâtre intime* and the Greek amphitheatre can produce fine plays, each of separate and quite distinct beauty ; but, at the same time, there is something of vastness and of majesty in the plays produced on the Greek stage which is impossible in the plays written for a *théâtre intime*. There may be delicacy in the latter ; there may be more poignant and subtle situations ; there will certainly be more intricate character-drawing ; but there will usually be lacking the statuesque effect, the grandeur, and the exalted tone of the other. History has shown to us that the finest dramas have been produced for heterogeneous audiences—the aristocrats and the artisans of Athens, the apprentices and the peers of Elizabethan England. Where the audiences tend to break into separate groups, where the theatre is patronized not by all, but by a class, then the drama produced for that theatre becomes weak and effeminate. Drama, it would appear, is not wholly a thing of pleasure in its highest forms ; in the ages when the theatre is merely a place of amusement, to-day and in Restoration England, then the average play-writing is poor and uninformed. Only in the periods when the theatre mingled pleasure with some species of reflection, some humanitarian, national, or religious ideal, was fine drama produced. Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides reflect the age of Periclean Athens ; Shakespeare reflects the age

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of Drake and of Raleigh; Schiller and Ibsen reflect the age of broader ideals. Disillusionment gave birth to the plays of the later seventeenth century and to the plays of to-day. The *théâtre intime* is the result of the desire of one class to abstract itself from the rest, to divorce the highest drama from the whole of humanity. It would seem that the hope of a genuine dramatic revival lies rather in the elevating of the tone of the vaster theatres than in the attempt on the part of some of our dramatic enthusiasts to further the theatre of the refined and circumscribed audience.

The Greek drama, therefore, teaches us that while mere slavish imitation of past models can lead toward nothing but dull and ineffective productivity, romantic dramatists may be wrong in throwing over entirely the precepts and the example of the classicists. While it may be admitted that, with the exception of Milton's *Samson Agonistes* and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (a dramatic poem rather than a drama), there is no readable imitation of the Greek drama in England, and while it may also be admitted that in details of dramatic technique the Greek drama has nothing to teach us, we must nevertheless realize that there are elements of permanent dramatic truth not only in the works of Æschylus, but in the apparently ridiculous theories of a Castelvetro and a Rymer.

EARLY ELIZABETHAN TRAGEDY.—The next type of tragedy which we have to note is the tragedy of the earlier Elizabethans, a type by itself in however many diverse forms it might be expressed. The first tragedies produced in England which can be deeply analysed are those of Shakespeare, but Shakespeare's achievement was, as is well known, raised upon the previous and less exalted endeavours of his predecessors, and this fact renders a glance at the history of the development of the tragic idea in England absolutely necessary here. In England, as in Greece, the drama sprang out of the religion of the people. By innumerable

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gradations it moved forward to the vast cycles of the mystery and miracle plays. Moralities then took their rise, probably with the development of more professional companies of actors. These moralities, again by innumerable gradations, passed into forms that approached toward truer dramatic shape, and then, grafted on to the new growth of humanistic sentiment, developed ultimately into the marvellous flourish and fruit of the Elizabethan stage. With this development went a corresponding progress in the conception of the tragic spirit. For the Middle Ages tragedy was essentially a falling from happiness or great estate into unhappiness or misery. Chaucer's lines from the Monk's prologue, already quoted, express summarily the typical medieval view. Dante's great poem was a "divine comedy," because it passed from the torments of Hell to the happiness of Heaven. Thus, for the Middle Ages, tragedy, as dealing with persons of high degree, with "him that stood in greet prosperitee," harmonized exactly with the Aristotelian idea that tragedy should deal with the hero of "high fame and flourishing prosperity." At the same time there arose almost unconsciously the feeling that tragedy should deal with these exalted deeds and persons in an exalted manner; hence verse in some form came to be the natural concomitant of all true tragedy, and this, likewise, joined forces with the verse plays of Seneca and with the then less well-known verse plays of ancient Greece. So far the Athenian and the medieval ideals coalesced. Medieval criticism, however, had one peculiarly characteristic feature: it expressed in the most extreme form the moral attitude toward literature. Swayed by strictures against the drama and indeed against all poetry which found expression from the time of the Fathers of the Church to that of Girolamo Savonarola, it attempted everywhere to discover some utilitarian end for every type of art and every piece of



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artistic workmanship. Moral considerations, therefore, met with the new humanistic ideals, and developed a type of literary criticism confused and heterogeneous, but none the less influential upon the development of dramatic literature. This clash is to be seen most clearly in the pronouncements of some of the late sixteenth-century theorizers. "Tragedy," says Puttenham, who may be taken as a representative of many others, "deals with the dolefull falls of unfortunate and afflicted Princes, for the purpose of reminding men of the mutability of fortune and of God's just punishment of a vicious life." Here, in this one sentence, we find ideas culled from ancient Greece and from medieval Europe mingled together and confused with no sense of their inherent incongruity. There is the Aristotelian idea of magnitude ; there is the medieval idea of fall from happiness into unhappiness ; there is the pagan idea of fortune ; and there is the Christian idea of moral punishment. The confusion is interesting and valuable, because from just such a confusion grew the drama of the Elizabethans.

As regards the general idea of tragedy at this time, we may sum up briefly by saying that, in the belief of all, tragedy consisted in the fall of the great ; that all were agreed as to the advisability of having five-act dramas (Horace here is responsible, and Seneca) ; that all were convinced of the value of a poetic form for tragedy ; that, consciously or unconsciously, no one would have denied the necessity for a 'moral' in all tragedies ; and that, perfectly unconsciously, the conflict of the old moralities was operating on the minds of the critics and the dramatists toward the stressing of an element neglected to a large extent in the Greek drama. Apart from these general suppositions and beliefs, the classicists parted company from the popular, so-called romantic, playwrights. Whereas the classicists held for the three unities, the popular playwrights, looking to native

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example, disdained or violated them ; whereas the classicists, with Sidney, regarded tragi-comedy as a ' mongrel ' creation, the popular dramatists, looking back to the crude admixture of sadness and mirth in the mysteries, patronized this form above all others ; whereas the classic dramatists and critics, following Horace, cried for declamation and for decorum, the popular writers strove to stress action, to make their tragedies vigorous, to deny nothing to the eyes of the spectators.

The Senecan influence had been working in Europe years before it passed to England. As early as 1315 was penned the *Eccerinis* of Albertino, a Latin drama modelled on the strict Roman form. In 1515 came the Italian *Sofonisba* of Trissino. By 1559, however, there had appeared in England the first translation of a Senecan drama, and it is from about this year that we can trace the growth of the classical species here. Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc* was acted only two years later, in January 1562. This *Gorboduc*, the first regular English tragedy, is the initiator of a long line of Senecan dramas, chill and uninteresting, but valuable to us because of their variations from the strict norm. *Gorboduc* has a native mytho-historical theme, not a classical subject, and the structure is closer to the old chronicle history manner than to the Roman type. Love passion was introduced into the composite *Gismond of Salerne*, and a native note into Thomas Hughes' *The Misfortunes of Arthur*. In these plays the unities are commonly broken, and English historical or quasi-historical themes are treated as well as stories borrowed from Italian *novelle*, but the whole is set in a framework of rigid and impossible declamation, and every turn of the plot is coloured by the medieval idea of a moral aim. There is the confusion here in creative art, such as it is, which was visible in the critical pronouncement of Puttenham quoted above.

Meanwhile, playwrights who had been tutored in the

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morality tradition were attempting in some crude manner to adapt that tradition to other themes and other styles. Most of these early plays, such as Edwardes' *Damon and Pithias*, R. B.'s *Apius and Virginia*, and Preston's *Cambises*, are "lamentable tragedies, mixed full of pleasant mirth." Shakespeare in later years might make fun of those crude attempts, but in them lay the stepping-stones of tradition from the productions of medieval days to his own works. Often not much of the morality tradition has been lost in these primitive dramas, but there are hints at the future development of the species. Nearly every one of them possesses its Vice and its personifications, but at the same time there is visible an endeavour to create something more in keeping with the newer age than anything that had gone before.

Along with this native, or semi-native, development of crude tragedy we must also note the development of the chronicle history, often with elements serious and tragic. Even from very early times there had been a tendency in the morality to substitute for a pure abstraction some typical and well-known royal figure. Bale's *King Johan* is a good example of this. From the presentment of history for the object of enforcing a moral lesson to the presentment of history in and for itself was obviously but a step. Although one Latin history play, the *Ricardus Tertius* of Thomas Legge, is thoroughly Senecan in manner it is perfectly obvious that Senecan methods would hardly harmonize with the freer development of the events of a king's reign. History evidently demanded a more natural and less trammelled mode of expression. In dealing with a king's career little could be concealed, and it was inevitable that the unities should be broken. As history, moreover, was never wholly tragic, and as thus high and low tended to appear in the one play, the impulse given to the development of tragi-comedy in such works as Pikeryng's *Horestes* or Preston's *Cambises*

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was here deeply strengthened. With the rise of patriotic sentiment in the latter half of the sixteenth century, these history plays became exceedingly popular, and even although they do not belong to the strict tragic type they must be duly taken into consideration when we are dealing with the elements which went to make up the Elizabethan drama.

In all of these various primitive types we see a struggle, sometimes conscious, but more commonly unconscious, toward the attainment of a truly national and truly unified drama. No one, however, had apparently considered carefully what would suit the tastes of the age. The classicists were severe and unwilling to depart overfar from their ancient laws and precepts, even if here and there they had to make concessions to popular predilections; the other dramatists, although they occasionally borrowed hints from Seneca, were rough and unformed in their conceptions and in their manner. It is now perfectly obvious that the only hope for the rise of a national drama lay in a conscious union of the two forces, the native elements providing variety and vitality, the classical elements providing unity and harmonious construction; but this fact may not have been so apparent to the critics and the playwrights of the age. Dramas like the anonymous *Locrine* and *Selimus* seemed to be tending in the right direction, but they, too, were unformed, and it was left to the University Wits to make the classical tragedy popular and the popular tragedy unified in construction and conscious of its aim.

Many of these University Wits confined their work to comedy, and hence may barely be mentioned here; although to them all, comedy writers and tragedy writers alike, is due the development of a freer and a sweeter blank verse; while to Lyly, who wrote only fantastic comedies, we owe the introduction of a finer, if conceited, prose style, and to Greene and Lyly alike those delicate romantic-realistic

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portraits of women which were taken over by Shakespeare in his early years and were later modified by him. By the time that these University Wits appeared the London world was ripe for the origination of the new drama. The private shows at the Inns of Court and elsewhere still continued, and were to continue till the closing of the theatres in 1642, but the centre of theatrical interest was now the professional actors, playing in regular theatres modelled partly on the old inn-yards where formerly they had performed, partly on the old mystery platform-stage, and partly on the Roman amphitheatres.

The audience was now a mixed body of spectators, embracing all classes from the courtiers to the rudest groundlings, all passionate and all accustomed to sights of blood, all demanding a rich, full-blooded drama, and all prepared, with the fiery enthusiasm born of the Renaissance, to listen to the finest outbursts of poetical frenzy, but not prepared, under any consideration, to witness anything artificial or stilted. The actors were men of the one histrionic profession, bent on making a livelihood and determined to sacrifice no opportunity of gain by adhering to theoretical prejudices, classical or otherwise. The stage conditions were medieval, admitting ample change of scenery, allowing for the episodic treatment of themes, if that should be deemed necessary. Already, even in the Inns of Court performances, it had been amply proved that the unities in their stricter forms were not in English taste, and that Renaissance enthusiasm and passion had burst aside the fetters of the more precise humanistic movement. The stage conditions, likewise, which permitted this multitude of shifting scenes, demanded a long description, which the audience would willingly listen to only when it was couched in the fullest of poetical forms. From the presence among the actors of famous clowns, added to the vital tradition of the medieval Vice, influenced

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too by the general atmosphere of the primitive English liturgical drama, came the demand for tragi-comedy. Tragedy, pure tragedy, could be produced only when it was of a bombastic, exaggerated kind, so thrilling and so gripping the imaginations of the spectators that they would be willing to sacrifice for a time that mirth which for them seasonably spiced the most serious of plays.

MARLOWE.—The man who, as is well known, finally established the tragic type in England was Christopher Marlowe. In his works, crude in construction as they appear when set in comparison with Shakespeare's later triumphs, we find for the first time a conscious striving to reach a form of tragedy that should be not so amorphous and so purposeless as the previous attempts in classical, popular, or chronicle history styles. Marlowe's dramas fall naturally into two groups: the first, consisting of *Tamburlaine*, *Dr Faustus*, and perhaps *The Jew of Malta*, stands apart from the later *Edward II*, a history play which shows a quite separate tragic aim. It is the first group that is of paramount importance as forming a type of tragedy by itself, hardly touched in its pure form by any other writer.

The first point we note about these early dramas is that their authors have all drunk deeply of a source unknown to the preceding dramatists. *Il Principe* of Macchiavelli had appeared at Florence in the year 1513, and from the date of its publication, in an ever-increasing wave of admiration and of abuse, its fame and notoriety spread through Europe. In England Marlowe, because of his independent and almost rebellious attitude toward life, was one of the first to embrace its doctrines and the doctrines which had sprung from it. Macchiavelli had made a god of *virtù*, expressing in imperishable prose that desire and that ambition which had operated in almost every Italian state, raising humble *condottieri* to principalities and dukedoms, and retaining them there by



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diverse selfish and cynical actions. Macchiavelli had denied all morality except that morality, if so it may be called, which operated for the good of the individual man. There is no action too ignoble for him to condemn, in his advice to his prince, so long as it leads toward making his position in the state more secure. Marlowe probably had in him some of this dominating egoistic power, and it is this that he has fixed on in his first three tragedies. There is an element of conviction in the prologue to *The Jew of Malta* which rings true ; the lines have been written by one who sincerely believed in the principles of *The Prince* :

And let them know that I am Machiavel,  
And weigh not men, and therefore not men's words.  
Admired I am of those that hate me most. . . .  
I count religion but a childish toy,  
And hold there is no sin but ignorance. . . .  
. . . Of the poor petty wights  
Let me be envied and not pitied !

This Macchiavellian strain may not have been taken up in its purer form by later dramatists, but great elements of it served to enter into the structure of many of the major Elizabethan tragedies. It presents the quality of boldness and of strength which was demanded on the English stage.

*Virtù*, will, ambition, call it what we please, always tends to overlook class. The majority of the Italian dukes and princes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were base-born men who had won their positions by sheer personal merit, confidence, or villainy. In Marlowe's dramas, similarly, the heroes are not of the class that had formerly appeared in tragedy. Tamburlaine is certainly a king when we see him on the stage, but he has been raised to empire from mere peasantry. Barabas is only a money-lender, and Faustus is an ordinary German doctor. Thus the old medieval conception of tragedy as the descent from greatness

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to misery was being supplanted by the Renaissance ideal of individual worth. The more ancient tradition continued to endure for centuries, but, as in the dramas of Shakespeare, it was being modified gradually by the Marlovian ideal.

In the same way, we find in Marlowe's tragedies a change in the tragic aim. The kernel of his dramas lies not so much in the falling of a great person from happiness as in the struggle of some brave ambitious soul against forces too great for it. The moral conception of tragedy for Marlowe was gone. The whole interest centres on the one personality; the attention of spectators and of readers is fixed on that personality and on the greatness and nobility which is connected with it. Tamburlaine is obviously the master of those about him. Faustus is one in whose hands infinite knowledge has been put. The Jew moves as a kind of super-mind among a mass of puppets whose lives he sways continually. There is the same sense of intellectual majesty in all Marlowe's heroes which is to be felt in Hamlet.

There are several other striking departures on Marlowe's part from contemporary procedure, one of the most important being his more poetical use of blank verse; but with these we need not deal. One other point, however, may be noted; and that is the tremendous advance which he made in *Dr Faustus* in his conception of an inner struggle as bearing a great part of the tragic interest. There is no struggle in the soul of Tamburlaine nor in the soul of Barabas, but what makes *Dr Faustus* really great is the hint at conflicting desires within the mind of the hero. Here it may not be uninteresting to observe that of all Marlowe's dramas *Dr Faustus* comes nearest in conception, character, and plan to the older moralities. In it we can trace the union of the morality with the new Renaissance ideals, all modified a trifle by reminiscences of Seneca. From this union later tragedy was to spring.

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Marlowe, of course, has many weaknesses, some due to his own youth, some due to the fact that he was a pioneer who had to hew out a way for himself without any master to guide or stay him. In structure he is decidedly of the older age, inheriting the native chronicle tradition of separate episodes loosely strung together. *Tamburlaine*, after all, is not really a drama in the ordinary sense of the word; it is merely a dramatized semi-epic of one man's fate. *Dr Faustus* is marred as a tragedy by its detached nature; it is simply a string of odd scenes connected inorganically together. *The Jew of Malta* lacks balance entirely, although how far this may have been due to later 'improvements' is not now determinable. A more serious defect in all Marlowe's early dramas is the absence of subordinate characters. All Marlowe's persons, by their very greatness, stand alone. They have no one to fight against. They are lonely figures set in a world of Lilliputians, with the gods alone as their masters. The only drama of Shakespeare's which to any extent presents this phenomenon is *Hamlet*, but even here, although no character but Hamlet rises to tragic proportions, there are *dramatis personæ* of interest and of individuality. Even more noticeable is the lack in Marlowe of women characters. In the typical Renaissance attitude expressed by the dukes and the princes of Italy in social life, by Macchiavelli in philosophy, and by Marlowe in drama, there was but little place for women. Women were winning their way to an independent life in the time of the Renaissance, actively through the work of persons as diverse as Vittoria Colonna and Veronica Franco, theoretically through the women characters of drama, but the philosophy and the attitude toward life expressed by a Macchiavelli and by a Marlowe were distinctly masculine in character. Marlowe shared not at all the spirit of Greene and of Lyly. Zenocrate in *Tamburlaine* is but a figurehead; no women

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but the Duchess and Helen enter into *Dr Faustus* ; Abigail in *The Jew of Malta* is little more than a shadow. It has already been seen that tragedy is more masculine than comedy, and that, moreover, there can be great tragedies with an almost entirely masculine cast. On the other hand, the study of great drama will prove to us that while the general temper of a tragedy is masculine women figures tend to make the atmosphere of a play more natural and general, and that the consistent elimination of women in the works of Marlowe proves in him a lack of sympathy with the whole of life. Combined with this lack of interest in women characters is Marlowe's complete lack of a comic spirit. The comic portions of *Dr Faustus* are inexpressibly dull, and those of *The Jew of Malta* rise little above buffoonery. *Tamburlaine*, the very type of his art, serious throughout and masculine in conception, lacks at once that contrast and relief which is presented in the tragedies of Shakespeare.

The general spirit of the Marlovian dramas, then, is of tremendous historical importance. That conception of Renaissance *virtù* battling onward to success and then falling unconquered before fate gave to English tragedy a theme of greatness and strength which before was wanting in it. Marlowe's drama is an inhuman drama, but, before Shakespeare could arise, men had to be taught to look for this strength and purpose in tragedy. On the other hand, all of these early dramas of Marlowe can be regarded as little more than experiments. They are not truly great ; they merely point the way toward the greatness of the future. By reason of their limitations, by reason of their lack of structural power, above all by reason of their want of more subtle characterization, they fall below the level of true tragedy.

SHAKESPEARE.—With Shakespeare we move upon another plane. The Shakespearian type of tragedy has not been taken over in its entirety by many dramatists, largely because of

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the vastness of its conception, but it forms a species of drama which has, in parts, found many imitators, and which has exercised an incalculable influence on all succeeding English tragic endeavour. In speaking of this Shakespearian type of tragedy we must confine ourselves almost entirely to the four major dramas. *Romeo and Juliet*, as we have seen, stands apart, as being a tragedy of fate and of outward circumstance. The major dramas are all formed on another plan, borrowing elements now from Seneca, now from Marlowe, and now from the more primitive native English plays. It may be noted in regard to these four plays that although they have all elements in common they seem all to be in the nature of experiments. *Hamlet* is peculiar in having but one figure of tragic magnitude ; *Othello* in being formed on a peculiar plan and in dealing largely with intrigue ; *Lear* in reverting technically to the chronicle history tradition and in adopting an actionless hero ; and *Macbeth* in transforming a villain into a hero. In all of these dramas, however, there are features which bind them together into one group. In every one there is an outer and an inner tragedy, the outer sometimes working in direct contrast to the inner. The outer tragedy is laid down on lines of the utmost sensationalism, dealing with murder and torture and bloodshed ; the inner tragedy is quieter and more poignant, involving usually a struggle between emotion and intellect, or between emotion and traits of character which have arisen out of habit and custom. So in *Hamlet* it is a struggle between the emotion of revenge, and perhaps also of love, warring against a certain quality which Hamlet himself names as " religion " and which we might call moral scruple ; in *Othello* it is passionate love warring against jealousy ; in *Lear* it is petty pride warring against a tenderer sympathy ; in *Macbeth* it is kingly ambition warring against the emotions that have arisen out of

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conscience. The same phenomenon is visible likewise in *Antony and Cleopatra* and in *Coriolanus*.

Apart from this, the two most noticeable characteristics of the Shakespearian type are the hint at supernatural forces operating unseen but surely, and the peculiar relationship which the hero bears to his surroundings. The supernatural element, which is displayed in its crudest form in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, is weakest in *Othello*, which approaches toward the domestic type, but even there it is delicately marked. In all the tragedies it is hinted at, yet, as we have seen, rarely enunciated in a deliberate manner. The relationship of the hero to his surroundings, however, is the definitely characteristic mark of the Shakespearian species. All Shakespeare's heroes are set in positions where they and they alone cannot battle with fate. Hamlet, the "religious" and the lover, doomed to set the world aright; Othello, stupid and unintellectual, fiery in his passions, set opposite to Iago; Iago, unscrupulous and clever, literally tempted by Othello's imbecility; Lear, conceited and proud, unobservant and credulous, faced by his evil daughters and by Cordelia; Macbeth, emotional and weak, yet ambitious, met by the witches and goaded on by his wife; Lady Macbeth, hard and self-seeking, confronted by temptation; Coriolanus, overweening in his pride, condemned to stoop to plebeians; Antony, amorous and doting, met by Cleopatra; all of these are placed in the exact situation which they are incapable of mastering. Put Hamlet in Othello's place or Othello in Hamlet's and there would have been no tragedy, either of the Shakespearian type or any other. It is this almost fatal confronting of the hero with forces beyond his strength that marks the tragedy of Shakespeare.

HEROIC TRAGEDY.—As is evident, the heroic tragedy of the Restoration is but an exaggeration of many of the elements we have noted above as characteristic of the Shakespearian



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species, with the omission of this fatal relationship between the hero and his surroundings. Here also there is clearly marked the outer drama and the inner, the inner being again a struggle between emotion (restricted to the one emotion of love) and intellect (narrowed down to duty), as well as the lofty nature of the hero of the tragedy, while supernatural aids to the drama are by no means lacking. The heroic tragedy needs little comment in a work that professedly deals most largely only with the finer species of dramatic productivity, but the fact that it is thus a normal development of earlier English tragic types gives it a peculiar historical and even critical value of its own.

HORROR TRAGEDY.—More important intrinsically is the horror tragedy patronized by Webster and Ford. This horror tragedy will be found, on examination, to approximate very closely to the comedy of intrigue, for in both the appeal to the audience is made not by means of the *dramatis personæ*, but by means of incident on the stage. This horror drama is not, of course, a strictly separate species, for elements of horror may enter into tragedies of quite a different type, as in *Hamlet* and in *Lear*; but it stands apart in having all or most of the stress on the outward elements with whatsoever there may be of inner tragedy closely interwoven with and depending upon the stage sensationalism. Horror from situation and incident thus dominates *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Vittoria Corombona*, and *The Broken Heart*, three plays which may be taken as characteristic of the species. Here there may be something of an inner struggle, ending disastrously, but that is not the prime point of interest in any of these dramas. Our attention is captured entirely by the development of the plot itself. The thrill of awe and of majesty hardly comes from any direct words or phrases, but from the incidents and from the situations in which the characters are involved.

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DOMESTIC TRAGEDY.—The domestic tragedy stands apart from all these types, not because of stress on one element or another, but because of its subject-matter and its special tone. In dealing with this species, it must be noted that the domestic tragedy can take one of two lines of development, the first leading toward true tragedy, and the second descending to a position similar to that of the sentimental drama. Tragedy, as we have seen, requires some atmosphere of what may be called majestic grandeur, and this, in many domestic plays, is entirely lacking. *The London Merchant*, for example, could never for a moment be associated with the high tragedies of any age of literary history, because of its lowered and uninspiring tone. On the other hand, many of the nineteenth-century dramas of a domestic type have about them a note which raises them above the level of the workmanship of Lillo's play. We may admit, as we shall see, the sentimental dramas, the *dramas*, to an honourable place in the history of theatrical productivity, but these domestic dramas of a lowered tone have attempted to achieve something which it is outside the power of tragedy to treat. We may include, therefore, in the types of high drama (1) plays of the true tragic spirit, majestic and awe-inspiring, (2) plays of the true comic spirit, fanciful and witty, and (3) serious happy-ending plays of a lowered tone; but we must regard as failures those domestic dramas which, attempting to gain the height of tragedy, lack altogether the sternness and grandeur of tragedy. One of the points which have been shown up most clearly in this analysis into dramatic productivity is that there are certain laws and characteristics in all great drama which no dramatist may transgress with impunity. There is an aim proper to tragedy, an aim proper to comedy, an aim proper to the serious *drame*; a confusion of these aims or the attempting of one aim in the medium of another leads only to failure or to mediocrity.

### III

## COMEDY

IN dealing with the subject of comedy, an attempt will here be made to carry an investigation along the lines already laid down in the treatment of tragedy, partly for the purpose of discovering the points of connexion between tragedy and comedy, partly for the purpose of stressing the different aims and methods of these two dramatic species. While our main concern here will be with pure comic productivity, it will be necessary at least to glance at the intermediate group of serious plays which seem to belong neither to the one class nor to the other, and also at that other group of dramas which are more properly styled tragi-comedies, in which tragic and comic motives meet and mingle. Even when we are discussing the purely comic species these two groups must always be kept in mind.

#### (i) UNIVERSALITY IN COMEDY

THE SUPERNATURAL.—As in tragedy there was a sharp distinction between melodrama, dramatized tales, and what may be styled high tragedy, so in the kindred realm of comedy there is a line of demarcation, slighter, it is true, and less to be appreciated by spectator or by reader, between a merely amusing play and what may be called fine comedy. Moreover, just as in tragedy this raising of tone was secured mainly by the element of universality, brought about by one means or another, so in fine comedy universality seems ever to be sought after by the greater dramatists. This quality of universality may, it is evident, be attained partly by

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methods similar to those already analysed in serious plays, but the fact that comedy differs from tragedy in being often heroless, realistic, and consequently unpoetic, renders several of these methods completely useless. The supernatural, in any of its cruder forms, could thus never have any entry into a comedy. The air of comedy is too cynical, too reasonable, too unemotional, to allow of any heavenly or spiritual visitants. If the gods descend to the earth in comedy, as in Dryden's *Amphitryon*, they do so in a frank spirit of farce. Mercury becomes a common serving-man and Jove takes on the attributes of mankind. The weird sisters of Shadwell's *The Lancashire Witches* are not as their companions in *Macbeth*. In the tragedy, although the actions and the words of the witches might be related to Macbeth's own thoughts, there is a sense of supernatural awe in their appearance; in the comedy, not only does the author express his scepticism in his preface, but he is careful to make many of his characters as sceptical as himself. Ghosts could never enter into a comedy of any kind, unless indeed those ghosts which are, in the end, resolved into mortal essence. The spirit of Angelica appears in Farquhar's *Sir Harry Wildair*, but in the last act reveals itself as the bodily form of Sir Harry Wildair's wife; a ghost is brought into Addison's *The Drummer*, but once more is discovered to be nothing but an earthly shape in disguise. The high emotion, the majesty, the awe of tragedy are all absent here; sacred things are laughed at; an air of reason and of disbelief permeates the whole.

That the finer suggestion of supernatural forces, however, is not wanting in comedy may readily be proved by a glance at the typical situations of many plays stretching from classical times to the present day. There are scores of comedies that depend for their main merriment on situations that are themselves founded on chance and on the suggestion

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of forces playfully baffling mankind. There cannot be, of course, the slightest enunciation here of an active fate. The fate sense, in its direct form, is utterly alien to comedy, but there may be the subtle hint of mocking gods behind the actions of the human figures on the stage. M. Bergson, of whose entertaining and profound study of *Le Rire* frequent mention will be made in the succeeding pages, has diagnosed as one of the chief sources of the risible what he styles inversion, which he connects with simple puppets on a string and with what he decides is of the essence of the laughable—automatism. Men are made into puppets; events take place in a series of extraordinary repetitions, where coincidence is not out of the question, but where at the same time there is more than a suggestion that the chance is not uninformed by some higher power. For instance, twins are born, so alike that they cannot be distinguished even by their parents. So far only nature has had a part; such twins may be found in any large town. But at this point the gods step in. They create a couple of twin serving-men, identical in appearance, and, not content with that, they separate the pairs of brothers for long years, to make them meet again in a series of extraordinary embarrassments in the town of Ephesus. Such is the stuff of *The Comedy of Errors*. This *Comedy of Errors* has but the spirit of *Romeo and Juliet* inverted. Fate is sporting with the Antipholi and with the Dromios, as a more solemn fate sported tragically with the unfortunate lovers. Repetition, inversion, *interférence de séries*, the three main theses of M. Bergson's chapter on the *comique de situation*, all depend in some way or another on the automatism of man in the hands of a higher power.

Here, then, is one of the first suggestions of universality in comedy. The gods are laughed at and sacred things are turned into causes of merriment, and yet a hint remains

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that there is more in heaven and earth than is dreamt of in any philosophy. The element of universality derived from suggestion of the supernatural, however, is by no means one of the chief in comedy as it was one of the chief in tragedy, and for the average dramatist it is an exceedingly dangerous medium. Unless in a purely fantastical play such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where there is a momentary suspension of disbelief, or in *The Tempest*, where the supernatural is related to human knowledge and human skill, a touch too crude will destroy all illusion. The supernatural may be introduced most freely in the comedies of romance, and hinted at in the comedies of manners, but only with the most delicate and most hesitating of outlines.

CLASS SYMBOLISM.—More potent and more common is the equivalent to the tragic hero of royalty and empire. Comedy, as we have seen, is ordinarily heroless, the mirth usually arising from the juxtaposition of a number of characters. An analysis of these characters will disclose to us that the playwright habitually endeavours to secure one of two effects, both dependent on the one idea: he will try to introduce several of a particular species or class, or he will try to suggest that a certain figure is itself representative of a class. The fundamental assumption of comedy is that it does not deal with isolated individualities. These classes thus presented in the body of comedy will obviously have broader ramifications beyond the walls of the theatre; and at once there will be raised in the minds of the audience a connexion between the particular work of art and the wider reaches of humanity as a whole. Very frequently, as we have already seen, humorous or laughable characters are presented in pairs or in groups. The artisans in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* include Bottom, Quince, Snug, and Starveling. Dogberry and Verges, Launce and Speed, the two Dromios—all of these, although foils



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to one another, are representative of particular classes, and their juxtaposition strengthens the assumption that their idiosyncrasies are not peculiar to themselves but shared by many another. In the comedies of manners we frequently find opposing bands of wits and of would-be wits. Not all the wits are alike; not all the would-be wits are alike; but each group has certain qualities common to all its varied representatives. The various "Schools" of the eighteenth-century comedy—*The School for Scandal*, *The School for Wives*, *The School for Greybeards*—all of them ultimately to be traced back to Molière's *L'École des Maris* and *L'École des Femmes*, present characteristics of an identically similar nature.

When a person is isolated in comedy he is nearly always a type, a representative of something broader than himself, and in the highest art a representative of what are the permanent classes of mankind. "The characters of Chaucer's Pilgrims," said William Blake, "are the characters that compose all ages and nations. . . . They are the physiognomies or lineaments of universal human life, beyond which nature never steps." Blake's words might, indeed, be applied to all fine comedy. Comedy may revel in the follies of an age, but we shall find that it usually seizes upon those particular follies which are permanent in all ages. Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek are not only Elizabethans; Captain Bobadill, even the gulls Matthew and Stephen, are in a way universal; there are Mirabels amongst us, and Sir Fopling Flutters and Mrs Malaprops. This permanent value we shall find in all the greatest comedies of the ages. It is this that makes Molière, Shakespeare, Congreve, and Sheridan as fresh to-day as when they wrote. Only the lesser dramatists will trouble themselves with the topical, the temporary, and the particular. It is the lack of these permanent elements

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that makes the comedies of Shadwell, well written and well constructed, so dull beside the comedies of Etherege; Shadwell strove to reproduce his age, and, accordingly, although he has historical value, he has less intrinsic worth than many of the other writers who were his contemporaries. Comedy may set out to be a mirror of the times; but far more, in its highest form, must it be a mirror of Time.

Comedy, therefore, from one point of view, is an abstract of society, or at least of certain aspects of society. If laughter is essentially the punishment of society inflicted on certain eccentric types and classes of mankind we can see how it operates to secure a broader significance than is included in the literal words and in the actual persons on the stage. It is true that the risible has something in it peculiarly racial and national, but there are general "lineaments" of humanity which seem to pass beyond the borders of the various lands. The virtuoso, the hypocrite, the miser, the simpleton who preens himself upon his wit—these are figures which are not peculiar to any one country, and they appear indiscriminately in the plays of Shakespeare, Jonson, Molière, and Congreve. There are, then, in high comedy two main suggestions: first, that the characters are not the characters peculiar to one age or to one place; and, second, that the comedy as a whole is but a part of, or a mere symbol of, the larger world of society beyond it. From this springs the feeling of generality, the feeling that is presented in high tragedy as well, that these facts and situations and persons are not isolated and separate, but are simply abstracts of something greater and of weightier significance than themselves.

THE SUB-PLOT.—This effect of universality may, of course, be secured in many other ways than these. The use of the sub-plot which we have already noted as a feature of romantic tragedy is to be found here too. The lover

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pursues a witty mistress, and the servant hunts the no less witty maid. There enters in once more M. Bergson's repetition, inversion, *interférence de séries*, in a slightly differing form. Sir Martin Mar-all is a fool and betrays his own plots; so does Sir John Swallow, his rival. Warner is clever and contrives wondrous devices; he is cheated in the end by Mrs Millisent. The lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have their quarrels; so have Oberon and Titania. Olivia in *Twelfth Night* is deceived by a girl dressed as a boy; Malvolio is cheated by a fool who pretends to be a clergyman. This tendency toward repetition of the main theme, or even toward parallel plots, each working to much the same end, is to be found in nearly all the romantic comedies; it has become almost a staple part of the comic stock-in-trade. That unconsciously its value was appreciated by the dramatists is proved by the fact that, just as the heroic tragedy of the Restoration exaggerated and made mechanical the true elements of tragic greatness, the Restoration comedy writers frequently elaborated to a ridiculous degree the qualities hinted at in Shakespeare and in his companions. What did Dryden and D'Avenant do with *The Tempest*? They made Ferdinand love Miranda as in Shakespeare, but they also created a sister for Miranda and provided a lover for her, a boy who had never seen a woman. They gave Ariel a spirit bride in Milcha, and presented Caliban with a sister in Sycorax. Not content with this, they exaggerated those scenes of the sailors, which in Shakespeare hint delicately at the connexion between the rule of Milan and the boorish republic of the mariners, and between both of these and the rule of Prospero. They made the Trinculo and Stephano scenes into a satire against democracy, and deliberately made explicit the comparison only hinted at before. This quality of repetition by means of a sub-plot is to be traced, too, in an exaggerated form in the plays of

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the Spanish intrigue type. Dryden's *The Spanish Fryar* is as good an example as any. The Queen loves the general Torrismond, but is more or less engaged to Bertran; by subterfuge she gains her ends. Elvira, married to old Gomez, loves the colonel Lorenzo, and employs subterfuge to see her lover. A scene between Torrismond and the Queen is followed by a scene between the more comical lovers; and at once there is raised in our minds, sub-consciously perhaps, a comparison between the two situations, and not only is the poignancy of the humour in the 'Spanish fryar' scenes increased by their opposition to the more serious court passages, but an atmosphere of inevitability and of generality is created by the repetition of the same theme. Still more noticeable in this play is the *dénouement*. Torrismond turns out at the end to be the son of the imprisoned monarch of the land, and therefore the real heir to the throne. Such a discovery, alone, might have appeared improbable—an isolated fact unrelated to the rest of the world, because of rare occurrence. Dryden, to counter this, has introduced an exactly similar discovery of identity. The lady whom Colonel Lorenzo has been pursuing turns out to be his sister. The two discoveries are made practically at the same moment and the shock of the two coming together is such that it creates an atmosphere which forms a fitting background for the events of the play. Shakespeare utilized something of the same device in *The Winter's Tale*. The queen Hermione has been kept in seclusion for sixteen years—a situation perilous indeed for the dramatist. She is revealed in the last act, but at the same moment it is discovered that her daughter is also alive, and Perdita becomes a princess. Again the close concurrence of the two events creates a spirit, a romantic glow, which aids the playwright in arousing in the minds of the spectators a belief in the events of the play, and,

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incidentally, in producing this atmosphere of universality. This concurrence, of course, need not always take the form of an identical or almost identical series of events. Thus, in Fletcher's *Wit at Several Weapons* there are two plots, but not of a similar character. In the one Sir Perfidious Oldcraft destines his niece for Sir Gregory Fop. She falls in love with and ultimately marries Cunningham. In this part of the plot occurs Pompey Doodle, who, believing that the niece is in love with him, gives himself airs. The second part of the plot deals entirely with the cheats put upon his father and his cousin Credulous by Witty-pate Oldcraft. Separate as all these events seem to be, there are yet a number of characteristics which bind them together and give them a universal significance. Thus, Pompey Doodle is opposed to and connected with Sir Gregory Fop, while, on the other hand, Credulous is opposed to Pompey Doodle. The whole theme of both plots, moreover, is deception and intrigue. In the one the niece cheats her uncle; in the other this uncle is tricked by his own son. Sir Perfidious Oldcraft forms the bond between the two, and helps to make connected these worlds of deception which, in their turn, by their close opposition render probable the most improbable situations in the play. A somewhat similar series of connected and opposed situations, still more complicated, appears in Fletcher and Massinger's *The Custom of the Country*. Here there are more than two plots. In the first place Arnolde marries Zenocia, and Clodio claims the custom of the country. Arnolde, his brother Rutilio, and Zenocia flee by boat. Zenocia is captured outside Lisbon, but Arnolde and Rutilio escape. Here the plot divides into separate spheres of interest. Arnolde is loved by Hippolyta, is tempted by her, refuses her offers, is cast into the hands of law officers, and is eventually released by her. This Hippolyta, moreover, administers poison to

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Zenocia, but brings her to life again. Rutilio, meanwhile, has apparently killed Duarte, son of Guiomar, a rich widow ; the last, through a promise, shields the supposed murderer. Rutilio later makes offers to Guiomar, is refused, and is cast by her into jail. At this moment Duarte, who has suffered no serious injury, reveals himself. Now here in these romantic events there are several situations which might have appeared improbable on the stage, and it is quite clearly to be seen that it is precisely these situations which have been duplicated and paralleled. Take the supposed death of Duarte, not impossible certainly, but unlikely. At once there is to be traced the similarity between that and the supposed poisoning of Zenocia. The two are brought to life just as suddenly and just as miraculously. Zenocia's purity is paralleled by Arnaldo's ; Clodio's lust by Hippolyta's. Hippolyta makes offers to Arnaldo as Rutilio to Guiomar. Arnaldo is taken up by Hippolyta as Rutilio is by the bawd. There is here, therefore, not merely one parallel, but a whole series of parallels, each one strengthening the atmosphere of the piece and suggesting to the audience the universality of these diverse romantic themes. One further note might be made in regard to these sub-plots and their various connexions. It has been evident from the examples given above that it is not always necessary that the separate parts in the development of a comic theme should be exact parallels ; the relation may be one of contrast rather than of similarity. This might still further be illustrated from Beaumont's comedy of *The Woman Hater*. The main plot here deals with the love of the Duke for Oriana, sister of Count Valoret. The lover sees his mistress at the house of Gondarino, who slanders her and leads her to a house of ill-fame. One of the two sub-plots deals with the rascal Palmer's forcing of the prostitute Francissina upon Mercer, a foolish but inoffensive tradesman.



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Quite obviously in this play there is no parallel; but the purity of Oriana, apparent after the lengthy series of intrigues and duplicities, stands in close contrast to the impurity of Francissina, also immersed in a series of intrigues and duplicities. The contrast, instead of weakening the spirit of the play, gives it a peculiar unity, which possibly might have been lost had the main plot stood in isolation.

EXTERNAL SYMBOLISM.—This play, *The Woman Hater*, also presents an example of the use of a certain kind of symbolism, closely related to the symbolism utilized with such effect in tragic themes. The second sub-plot has for its subject the courtier Lazarillo, one who adores strange viands, and it treats of his following the rare fish-head in its wanderings from house to house. This fish-head is the link between the various otherwise disconnected portions of the play. It carries us from palace to hovel, and in its way succeeds in raising a connexion between the Duke, Francissina, and Mercer. It is an external object which has a force beyond itself, a generalizing force, which at one and the same time unifies the play and gives it a sense of universality. This employment of an external object is naturally not of such wide occurrence in comedy as it is in tragedy, but it makes its appearance sporadically throughout the history of this type of drama and must be included in any analysis of the characteristics of the species. Possibly along with it might be mentioned the utilization of some scene or locality which bears a symbolic relation to the events of the play. Thus, in *The English Traveller* the house which is reputed to be haunted serves as a means of linking together the two plots of the play and of suggesting something besides; in *As You Like It* the forest of Arden, unseen by sensual eyes on the Elizabethan stage but present to imaginative vision, serves as a symbol of the emotions raised in that comedy.

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STYLE AND PATHETIC FALLACY.—Finally, there are two other methods which must be taken into our account. The first of these is style, and the second is that device which may be named pathetic fallacy. Of the latter examples have already been given from *Much Ado about Nothing* and from *The Merchant of Venice*. Nature, certainly, is not made to sympathize with man's emotions so frequently in comedy as in tragedy, and the marked instances given above are both, it will be noticed, from comedies of a serious, almost tragic, cast; yet the device is not unknown even in plays of the most artificial and most satirical kind. It can be traced all through the lighter productions of Shakespeare, and even makes its appearance in the midst of the town laughter of the drama of the Restoration. In style, too, there are marked differences between the tragic and the comic species. Whereas verse has until recent days been acknowledged as the prime medium for serious plays, prose has ever tended to be the medium for comedy. At the same time, blank verse has been freely used not only in Elizabethan comedies, but in comedies of the Restoration and later periods. Song, too, appears in these as in tragedies. This sporadic utilization of verse and frequent introduction of song probably marks a desire on the part of the playwrights to rise beyond the level of mere prose. Prose, certainly, is the fitting medium for comic dialogue, and the fact that it was not always retained tends to prove the existence of this subconscious desire.

Comedy, then, like tragedy, must have some universality; it must have some ramifications and connexions beyond the theatre. That universality is attained generally by the classes of the *dramatis personæ*, by the types and by the peculiar nature of the sub-plots, but the dramatists throughout the centuries have made constant, if not always organized and deliberate, use of other devices lying ready to their hands.

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### (ii) THE SPIRIT OF COMEDY

CLASSIFICATION OF DRAMA.—It has already been noted in the first part of this inquiry that there is no sharp line of demarcation between tragedy and comedy, that the two have been freely used together by all but the most precise and the most artificial of the pseudo-classicists, and that there are certain types of tragedy and of comedy which have intimate relations one with another. This being so, it becomes exceedingly difficult to determine accurately not only what are the main characteristics of comedy itself, but whether certain plays are to be included in the one category or in the other. We may easily determine that *Othello* is a tragedy and that *The Way of the World* is a comedy; but there are countless dramas which appear to lack the distinguishing characteristics of the one type or of the other. There are, for example, a number of what may be called problem plays, dating from the days of Shakespeare to our own times, which end in a fairly happy manner, and which yet have none of that sparkle and gaiety which is usually accepted as the prime quality of the comic muse. There are, again, problem plays which end unhappily, but not with death; where gloom hangs over the production from the beginning to the end, but where there is nothing on which we can lay our hands and say, "This is truly tragic emotion." There are the plays of the poetic justice order, where good characters are saved and evil characters are duly disposed of by execution or by murder. There are amorphous plays, such as *The Winter's Tale*, where death comes to characters of perfect honesty and goodness, but where the end is not predominatingly tragic. There are, too, plays, mostly of the time of the early seventeenth century, where a genuinely tragic *motif* runs parallel to a *motif* as genuinely comic. There are plays such as some of Shakespeare's tragedies, where

odd comic scenes, not developing into an ordered sub-plot by themselves, are interposed at infrequent intervals, destroying, according to the neo-classic critics, intensifying, according to the romantic critics, the terror and the awe of the more serious portions. Among these, then, with infinite gradations, there are to be found not any clearly marked divisions, but a whole series of classes, the one merging almost imperceptibly into the other. If we accept for the moment the usual concomitant to a tragedy, the unhappy ending, and the usual concomitant to a comedy, the happy ending, and if at the same time we adopt the use of the term *drame* for a play not sparkingly amusing but yet no tragedy, and if we confine tragi-comedy to those plays where true tragic elements run parallel to true comic elements, we may be able to frame a very rough classification of the majority of plays, always remembering the fact noted above, that the one class can almost imperceptibly fade into the other. This rough classification, imperfect as it may be and of no practical utility for critical purposes, may serve at least as a guide in the following investigation.

- (1) The tragedies unrelieved by comic elements:  
*Othello, Ædipus Tyrannus, Ghosts.*
- (2) The tragedies with a slight introduction of mirth, never formed into a regular under-plot, and presented mostly for the sake of relief or of contrast: *Macbeth, Hamlet.*
- (3) The tragi-comedies where tragic and comic elements have an almost equal balance: *The Changeling.*
- (4) The tragi-comedies where a comic under-plot holds a subordinate position: *The English Traveller.*
- (5) The tragi-comedies where the comic is the main theme, and the tragic forms an under-plot: *The Winter's Tale, Much Ado about Nothing.*

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- (6) The poetic justice plays, where good characters are preserved, and evil characters are destroyed : *The Conquest of Granada*.
- (7) The *dramas* which end happily : *The Road to Ruin*.
- (8) The *dramas* which have not a completely happy solution : *The Merchant of Venice*.
- (9) The *drame-comedies*, where a serious plot mingles with comic elements : *Secret Love*, *The Spanish Fryar*.
- (10) The satiric comedies, where the ending may be, and usually is, of the poetic justice order : *Volpone*.
- (11) The comedies, where the ending is happy and where the dialogue and the theme are wholly laughable : *The Way of the World*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

It is primarily this last category with which we have now to deal, although elements from the others will necessarily enter into our investigation.

From this classification it is seen that, just as tragedy does not depend wholly on an unhappy conclusion, comedy does not depend primarily on the ending of the play ; that is to say, a play ending happily, even brightly, is not necessarily a comedy. The comic spirit is embodied in the midst of the dialogue and the situations. A happy ending may be necessary, but it is not the distinguishing characteristic.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN 'DRAME' AND COMEDY.—M. Bergson has undoubtedly seized upon the fundamental point of difference when he indicates that the *drame* invariably deals with personalities, while true comedy deals with types and with classes. The plays of Kotzebue, so popular in England at the close of the eighteenth century, are *dramas* because, however weak the characterization may be at times, there is at least an attempt to secure individuality of

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expression. *Measure for Measure* is a *drame* largely because the main figures are not types but persons. *Volpone*, although there is little that is laughable in it, is not a *drame*, because Volpone himself, Corbaccio, Lady Politick Would-be, and the rest are pure types not in any way individualized. *Volpone* we may call a serious or satirical comedy. At the same time, there are other characteristics of the *drame* beyond the mere presentation of the *dramatis personæ*. Again, M. Bergson has hinted at another distinction when he lays down the rule that comedy depends upon insensibility on the part of the audience. As soon as we begin to sympathize then we entirely lose the spirit of laughter, and we begin to sympathize when we see before us not types but personalities. If we felt pity for Mercer in *The Woman Hater* then the whole play in which Mercer appeared would cease to have any comic pleasure for us. This partly explains the loss for us to-day of an appreciation for what was risible a couple of centuries ago. Undoubtedly, as man passes from the primitive savage stage of his history to a more developed plane his emotions and his feelings are increased, and that for which he would never have felt pity before becomes an object of tears and of commiseration. Bear-baiting and cock-fighting were sports of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but they would not be sports to the majority of people in the twentieth century. Undoubtedly, later ages will look back with surprise on our own popular sport of chasing a wretched fox with full panoply of hound and horn. This increase of sensibility, the product of emotion and of feeling, rapidly kills the available sources of the comic, and may explain not only the lack of appreciation we feel in many Elizabethan comedies, but also the fact that so few true comedies are produced in modern times. Sensibility has always been connected with a moral note, which is expressed usually by means of a problem.



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A problem of some kind or another lies at the back of every *drame*. It colours *Measure for Measure*, just as it colours any of the modern plays of the same cast. There is never a problem in pure comedy, because the events on the stage, universal as they may be in significance, are never directly related to the actual conditions of life. In comedy, as personalities are artificialized into types, so the situations are removed so far from the situations of actual life that there is no direct relation established between the two. Any of the marriages in seventeenth-century comedy would, if brought down to the levels of ordinary existence, cease entirely to be comic; and here again arises a question of the appreciation of the older comedy. With the rise of sentiment and of feeling, modern readers and spectators are enabled to get beyond the artificiality and to reduce that artificiality to mortal essence. Just as they get beyond the barriers of the type, so they get beyond the barriers of the situation. It is this that accounts for Addison's strictures on *Etherege*; it is this that explains the thesis of Macaulay's article on "The Artificial Comedy."

Comedy, then, as such, we find separated from the *drame* by the substitution of type for individual, insensibility for emotion, moral sentiment (the relating of art to life and the consequent presentation of a problem) for pure artificiality. We can trace the merging of the one into the other very clearly in the giant person of Falstaff. Falstaff is a comic figure; but, in Shakespeare's hands, he grows out of his world, and, ceasing to be a type, develops into a formal entity of his own. He is individualized, and so steps out of the bounds of comedy into the bounds of serious drama. It is this that accounts for the dissatisfaction we feel at the close of the second part of *Henry IV*. Had Falstaff remained a mere type as Pistol and Bardolph are types, we should have felt no sorrow at his rejection; but as Shakespeare has made

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him a personality and has treated him as if he had been a purely comic type we feel the incongruity of the situation, and for once are hardly inclined to accept without a murmur the words and the actions of the dramatist-creator. The clash of the two moods or methods produces an apparent disharmony. For the Falstaff of *The Merry Wives*, on the other hand, we feel no pity, because in *The Merry Wives* he is merely a type. The dramatist here could have done anything to him and we should not have cared.

SATIRE AND COMEDY.—*Drame*, thus, as well as tragedy, has been separated from comedy proper : tragedy as being distinguished by an unhappy ending and a plot arousing the feelings of awe and of majesty ; *drame* as dealing with emotion and with personality. There remains for us still the analysis of the characteristics of comedy itself. Already there has been raised a problem in *Volpone*. *Volpone* is a comedy, yet we do not laugh at it. Is laughter, then, not necessary for comedy ? Is the risible not the *sine qua non* in this type of drama ? The problem raised by such a question as this is undoubtedly a vital one, and hits deep at the essential qualities of the comic species. Here obviously there must be made some distinction between satire and pure laughter.<sup>1</sup> Satire may certainly be laughable, as, for example, in the opening lines of Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe* :

All humane things are subject to decay,  
And, when Fate summons, Monarchs must obey :  
This *Fleckno* found, who, like *Augustus*, young  
Was call'd to Empire and had govern'd long :  
In Prose and Verse was own'd, without dispute  
Through all the realms of Non-sense, absolute.  
This aged Prince now flourishing in Peace,  
And blest with issue of a large increase,

<sup>1</sup> There is an interesting study of satire in J. Y. T. Greig's recent volume on *The Psychology of Laughter and Comedy*.

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Worn out with business, did at length debate  
To settle the Succession of the State ;  
And pond'ring which of all his Sons was fit  
To Reign, and wage immortal War with Wit,  
Cry'd, 'tis resolv'd ; for Nature pleads that He  
Should onely rule, who most resembles me :  
*Shadwell* alone my perfect image bears,  
Mature in dullness from his tender years ;  
*Shadwell* alone of all my Sons is he  
Who stands confirm'd in full stupidity.  
The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,  
But *Shadwell* never deviates into sense.

These words, assuredly, may call more than a smile to our lips, and, if recited in a theatre, might give rise to a roar of merriment ; but fundamentally their object, save in certain witty turns of phrase, is not primarily to arouse a laugh or even a smile. Their object is to cast derision upon some person or upon some thing. The satirist, however, is not a moralist in the sense that Steele is a moralist. The true moralist appeals nearly always to the feelings and not to the intellect, and the satirist rarely plays upon the emotions. The satires of Juvenal are hard, presenting to the reader a series of pictures addressed to the reason. We are not called upon to sympathize with anything or to feel emotions of any kind in *Volpone*. Swift's satires appeal entirely to the intellect. Thackeray is a satirist because of his extraordinary piercing eye and brain. Nor does the satirist attack pure vice from the moral point of view. Steele will inveigh against duelling ; Moore will attack gambling ; Holcroft will attack horse-racing—all through the medium of the emotions and because the sentiments of the writers have been aroused by pity for one ruined, or by religious feelings. The satirist lashes vice largely because of its folly ; and he lashes, besides vice, objects which are not necessarily in the least immoral. Thus Swift may include

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vice in his satirical pictures in *Gulliver's Travels*; but he passes far beyond vice as such. His real object, as it is the real object of every satirist, is to ridicule follies. It is only because follies when exaggerated often become vicious and immoral that the writer of satire becomes in many cases apparently a moralist. Wycherley is no moralist in *The Plain Dealer*, although he has frequently been made out to be such. What he attacks is not the immoralities of his time, but the follies—the fops and the simpletons and the would-be wits.

The division between satire and pure comedy is, as is evident, excessively slight. Satire may be so mild that it can barely be detected under its mask of laughter, for satire fades in some of its forms imperceptibly into both wit and humour. Still, the fact remains that we really do not laugh at the satirical as such; we laugh at the purely comic qualities with which it is accompanied or in which it is enclosed. The purest of comedy, however, usually rules satire in any form out of its province. The appeal of this pure comedy is solely to the laughing force within us. When comedy is thus separated from the moral sense and even from satire which lashes follies, including vices among these follies, it is evident that there is little truth in the old claim that “Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he representeth, in the most ridiculous and scornefull sort that may be . . . [so that] there is no man liuing, but by the force trueth hath in nature, no sooner seeth these men play their parts, but wisheth them in *Pistrinum*.”<sup>1</sup> This is purely the argument of a poetry-lover who has had to meet the attacks of a misopoetic moralist. To us to-day it is plain that there is not the slightest hint of this in the purest comedy. If we regard types as types, if we do not sympathize with their good qualities, then we have

<sup>1</sup> Sidney, *Apologie for Poetrie*, ed. Arber, p. 45.

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no hope of scorning their evil qualities. Bardolph is laughable, Pistol is laughable, Sir Martin Mar-all is laughable; but we assuredly never for a moment wish any of the three "in *Pistrinum*." The satiric spirit may at times become sufficiently strong in a comic dramatist to make him ridicule certain follies, but this is apart from his main aim, which is to make the audience laugh. Of direct morality in comedy, as in tragedy, there is absolutely none.

THE SOCIAL ASPECT OF COMEDY.—At the same time, of indirect morality of a sort there is a considerable amount in certain kinds of comedy. Morality ultimately springs from social conventions, and laughter is predominately social. We do not laugh overmuch when we are by ourselves, or, if we do, we imagine the jest shared with some other person or persons. A witty remark read in solitude in a play may attract our intellect, but we do not laugh at it; a humorous character may appeal to us, but it will not make us laugh as the same character would do in a theatre. Laughter is essentially a social thing; the richest laughter rises out of the group-mentality. Laughter, however, as we have seen, is in most of its forms directed against eccentricity of some one type or another. To such an extent is this true, indeed, that M. Bergson has declared that insociability on the part of the object of laughter is a necessary condition. While this may be rather a straining of a particular thesis, it must be admitted that in the majority of cases it is true. Laughter, then, becomes an attack by society as a whole, or by a particular portion of society, on what it regards as anti-social, something out of the way and possibly provocative of harm.<sup>1</sup> This laughter, however, is never directed against anything masterful or more powerful

<sup>1</sup> That this closely approaches satire is obvious. The distinction might be made that while satire is conscious this cognate characteristic of the comic spirit is largely unconscious.

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than the ordinary. The laughter of society goes out only toward that which falls lower than the average mentality or the average custom. Just as greatness in the *dramatis personæ* of a tragedy presupposes a lack of pity in the audience, so greatness of type in a comedy rules out the possibility of laughter arising at that type, except, indeed, in the few cases where that type is a wit, when the laughter is not at, but with, him. When the mentality or the habits of the type vary from the ordinary levels of social conventionality, and when that type is felt to be not greater than the average, then laughter is really aroused, and is, in fact, the unacknowledged reproof of society. A miser is anti-social, but because of his meanness he becomes lower than the usual level, and is, if presented as a type, a laughable figure. If he is presented as a person, on the other hand, the laughter cannot possibly be raised; we could never dream of laughing, or of having the opportunity for laughing, at Simon Eyre. So, conceited folly is anti-social, and society will laugh with indifferent merriment at the clownish airs of a Pompey Doodle and at the self-assurance of a Sir Martin Mar-all.

From this point of view, comedy as the artistic medium for the expression of laughter, having these distinctly social qualities, may be regarded from a quite definitely utilitarian standpoint; but, for the most part, this social quality in laughter has not only been largely lost in more fully developed communities, but is never consciously in the mind of any particular dramatist at the moment of creation. Comedy exists not for any purpose it may have, but in and for itself; it does not even require to have any of that sense of high morality which we found to be necessary in tragedy. It may be that the morally purer comic dramatists are those who will most be remembered, because of our sensibility and our feeling of moral fitness, but laughter exists independently of any outward considerations, religious, moral, or other. It is



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the laughter we look for in comedy, not the sense of moral right or of moral wrong, not the purpose or the significance of the play.

THE SOURCES OF THE COMIC.—The source of the risible is a subject on which have been written not a few theses, brilliant as well as dull. Fundamentally different these theses are, but in each of them is some indication of the truth. In probably not a single one of them are all the reasons of our laughter fully analysed. Aristotle evidently believed the risible to lie in degradation ; men, he says, are in comedy made worse than they are and consequently become objects of merriment.<sup>1</sup> Kant and after him a whole series of critics and of philosophers, from Schopenhauer to Hazlitt, have discovered the secret of laughter to lie in the incongruity of two facts, two ideas, two words, or two associations. "The essence of the laughable," declares the last-mentioned writer, "is the incongruous, the disconnecting of one idea from another, or the jostling of one feeling against another." M. Bergson, going farther and taking this view in his philosophical sweep of the subject, has devised another theory based in reality on both those referred to ; namely, that the conditions of comedy are insociability on the part of the object of laughter, insensibility on the part of the laugher, and a certain automatism in the situation, in the words, or in the character that appears ludicrous.<sup>2</sup> This theory M. Bergson has traced out along the three lines of repetition, inversion, and *interférence de séries*, seeing in each a certain reduction of the living thing to a machine-like *raideur* or inelasticity.

There is much that can be said for the brilliant French

<sup>1</sup> This view he puts forward not only in the *Poetics* but also in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Plato's theory, enunciated in the *Philebus* and since elaborated by later critics, that the comic is fundamentally malicious should be taken into account here.

<sup>2</sup> The comic for Bergson always derives from "something mechanical encrusted on the living."

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philosopher's theory ; yet it seems not quite comprehensive. The truth lies in a higher harmony, with the introduction of perhaps one or two other explanations for special species of merriment. Degradation, incongruity, automatism, of course, may mean much or little, may include much or little, according to the interpretation we put upon the words ; but if these words are taken at their ordinary value the theories to which they give the titles would, even when taken together, hardly seem to explain all the manifestations of the laughable. There is, for example, the laughter that arises at times out of an exceedingly solemn and serious situation, not because of some incident or word or person that may appear incongruous, but because of some mood working within us. There are not, I presume, many people who on some such occasion when they themselves felt serious and even sad have not broken into a smile, if not into open laughter. It may be that there is subconsciously an incongruity presented either between the normal mood of man and this exceptional solemnity, or between the solemnity and some unacknowledged idea or reminiscence which comes dimly to the consciousness and arouses the laughter ; but it would appear more probable that the merriment comes straight from the sacred or solemn occasion itself, that the smile or the laugh is an unconscious attempt of our only half-conscious selves to escape from the bonds of the solemn and the sacred. This merriment at sacred things or on solemn occasions is a spontaneous merriment ; it is aroused apparently by none of those springs of the risible which have been indicated above. This spontaneous laughter must, naturally, be carefully distinguished from the laughter that may arise as a secondary result of it. The contrast of the spontaneous laugh and the solemnity of the occasion may cause others, through the sense of incongruity, themselves to burst into merriment, merriment that is clearly explainable under the theory of Hazlitt.

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The essential source of the spontaneous laugh would seem to be a desire for liberation, liberation from the restraints of society, and as such it is entirely the opposite of the social laughter analysed by M. Bergson. What is it that makes us laugh at a reference to the indecent? There may, of course, be a double reason for merriment expressed at a 'smoking-room' story, or at a Restoration comedy. There may be wit in the utterance, or there may be incongruity of a rougher sort; but even a tale or a dialogue that is not essentially witty or incongruous may cause merriment. There is nothing here of automatism; other reasons must be sought for if we are to explain it aright. Mr Sully has suggested that the reasons for this laughter lie in a breach of rule or of order and in a loss of dignity, but even these do not seem to meet the case. The real cause would appear to lie in the sense of liberation which the laugh itself involves. It is the liberation of the natural man from the ties and conventions of society. In the same way, we may explain the laughter which greeted in the Middle Ages the appearance of the Devil-character of the mystery plays. There could be little sense of incongruity in this and none of automatism; it was the laugh of liberation, just as the Feast of Fools was a whole festival of merriment, celebrating liberation from the too strict bonds of the Church.

INCONGRUITY.—Degradation, incongruity, automatism, and the sense of liberation are all sources of laughter, and these are by no means exhaustive. Of them all, however, undoubtedly the greatest is incongruity. It is the incongruity of Jove in Amphitryon's shape, of Mercury in the form of a serving man, that provides the prime comic essence of Dryden's play. It is the discrepancy between the idea and the object which provides the cause of laughter in *L'Étourdi*. It is the incongruity between two ideas that presents to us the twin qualities of wit and of humour.

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In another chapter it was stated that mere eccentricity is not comic unless it be opposed to or contrasted with something that is normal. No comedy can be a true comedy unless there is presented alongside of the humorous situation, words, or character something that is more or less ordinary. A comedy full of eccentric types ceases largely to be a cause of merriment. This explains the fact that in all our finest comedies we find as a central pivot a pair or a quartette of *dramatis personæ* who, although not closely individualized, are by no means absurd, and around them a body of mere eccentrics—characters who take their colouring from their contrast with the central figures. In *Twelfth Night* the Duke, Sebastian, Viola, and Olivia form the centre of the picture; Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek are ridiculous because seen in their light. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Theseus and Hippolyta are the centre; the artisans are absurd in comparison with them. It is noticeable in this connexion that in nearly every comedy of any outstanding merit we find two sharply differentiated series of names given to the *dramatis personæ*. In the plays cited above Aguecheek, Belch, Snout, Bottom, Starveling have 'humours' names; Viola, Olivia, Theseus and the rest have ordinary names of mankind. *The Way of the World* has Mirabel and Millamant, beside Witwoud, Petulant, Waitwell, Foible, and Mincing. *The Provok'd Husband* has Manly and Lady Grace, and around them Sir Francis Wronghead, Count Basset, John Moody, Mrs Motherly, and Mrs Trusty.

This tendency to institute a comparison between two sets of characters is of the essence of the comic conflict; it is a feature of modern drama just as it was a feature of the drama of ancient Rome. The *Eunuchus* of Terence has Chremes and Phædria, Antipho and Chærea, with the opposed characters of Gnatho and Thraso and Parmeno. *Heauton*  
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*Timorumenos* presents Clitipho and Clinia as opposed to Chremes and Menedemus, Dromo and Sostrata. So in modern times we find the average intelligence placed in strict juxtaposition to the equivalents of the old fathers and the cheating servants and the vaunting soldiers of the ancient stage.

Beyond the mere enumeration of the causes of merriment we must note that laughter can be caused both consciously and unconsciously, and that it may take on varying shapes and forms in accordance as it is mingled with non-humorous matter. Wit is thus, as we have already seen, purely conscious; the wit sets himself to raise a laugh. He plays with words; his fancy works swiftly, and out of the movement of his fancy he orders phrases and ideas in such a manner that others laugh along with him. The absurd on the other hand is purely unconscious. We laugh at "l'étourdi," but he himself is quite innocent of the cause of our merriment. This distinction between wit and the absurd is, naturally, an important one, for it completely separates the spirit of *Twelfth Night* from the spirit of *The Way of the World*; the two, to all intents and purposes, belong to separate and almost unrelated types of literary composition. In many ways *Twelfth Night* is far more nearly allied to some species of early tragedy than to the later Restoration comedy.

HUMOUR.—A distinction must also be made between wit or the absurd and what is usually known as humour. The word humour has, of course, had an exceedingly varied history from its inception as of the kin of humid, through its Jonsonian sense in the seventeenth century, to its modern, rather indefinite signification. Humour is not the same as the ludicrous; humour in some of its forms barely makes us smile. We can readily in concrete examples separate it both from wit and from the absurd, yet it is difficult to place our finger on the precise points wherein it differs from these.

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"Humour," decides Hazlitt, "is the describing the ludicrous as it is in itself; wit is the exposing it, by comparing or contrasting it with something else." This, from the point of view of comic creation, is certainly true; but it does not explain why one character or one phrase is styled humorous and another witty; nor does it explain wherein lies the difference between the ludicrous and humour. M. Bergson, proceeding farther, discovered in humour the inverse of irony. In irony we pretend to believe what we do not believe; in humour we pretend to disbelieve what we actually believe. This carries us considerably nearer the goal of definition; but even this theory is not of universal application. It may explain some, nay many, forms of humour, but it leaves quite a number totally unaccounted for. The most thorough and the most far-reaching analysis yet presented to us is undoubtedly that given by Mr Sully in his *Essay on Laughter*. His words may be quoted in full.

These contrasts [between ordinary laughter and the laughter that arises from humour] point clearly enough to certain positive characteristics of the moods of humour. A quiet survey of things, at once playful and reflective; a mode of greeting amusing shows which seems in its moderation to be both an indulgence in the sense of fun and an expiation for the rudeness of such indulgence; an outward, expansive movement of the spirits met and retarded by a cross-current of something like kindly thoughtfulness; these clearly reveal themselves as some of its dominant traits.

Humour is, says Mr Sully, distinctly a sentiment, yet at the same time it is markedly intellectual.

These qualities of restraint, of reflection, of pity, of kindness are assuredly the distinguishing marks of the humorous temperament. The presentation of the ludicrous can be cruel and coarse, as in the comedies of Shadwell; wit can be biting and cynical, as in the comedies of Etherege and of Congreve; humour is always mellow and generally refined.



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It is certainly intellectual in that it appears only after a large and comprehensive view of the world; its greatest exponents have nearly all been men of intense intellectuality; but, at the same time, they have been men of feeling. If insensibility is demanded for pure laughter sensibility is rendered necessary for true humour. Humour we shall find is often related to melancholy of a peculiar kind; not a fierce melancholy, but a melancholy that arises out of pensive thoughts and a brooding on the ways of mankind. Had Congreve written of Don Quixote he would have made of the Knight de la Mancha a figure larger than, but on the same scale as, his own Petulant or Witwoud. He would have had not the slightest sympathy for the eccentric medievalist. Cervantes, on the other hand, being a humorist, has laughed, but his laughter is tinged with and mellowed by sympathy and even by a certain melancholy of spirit. So far, M. Bergson's theory is right—that the humorist often takes delight in poking fun at that which he holds most sacred or at that for which he has a secret sympathy. The absurd character puts forward all his follies, unconsciously, to the world; the man of wit sneers and mocks at everything which is different from himself; the humorist is himself an eccentric who sees the fun of his eccentricity. This fact is very clearly to be seen in the humorous stories of such nationalities as the Scotch and the Irish. The Scotsman and the Irishman delight in telling tales against themselves or against their own country, not because they despise their countries, but because they love their countries, even although a sense of humour displays to them their native eccentricities. Humour therefore is a union of unconscious with conscious laughter. Wit is the laughter of the ordinary man or of the intellectual man directed at others abnormal; humour is the laughter of the eccentric directed against himself.

In this brief survey of some of the main theories regarding

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the laughable we have found, first, that there are three cardinal reasons for an object's being ludicrous—degradation, incongruity, automatism ; and alongside of these a number of subsidiary causes, such as the sense of liberation ; second, that the objects of laughter are unconscious of their ridiculousness ; and, third, that there are two species of the risible, wit and humour, which lie apart from the rest in being conscious and, in the case of humour, sympathetic. In the world of the theatre these various species of the laughable are presented in five main ways—through the physical attributes of the *dramatis personæ*, through the mentalities of these *dramatis personæ*, through the situation, through the manners, and through the words. A rapid survey of concrete instances may close this section.

LAUGHTER ARISING FROM PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES.—The laughter that arises from merely physical attributes of the *dramatis personæ* in a comedy is obviously of the lowest possible kind. The music-hall comedian and the clown in the circus know how to raise coarse laughter by this means ; but no great comedy will depend upon it for more than an infinitesimal part of its merriment. The principle of degradation provides for physical deformities of a laughable type. Bardolph's nose is a deformity that is meant to cause laughter in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and it succeeds to a certain extent. This source of the comic, however, is seriously restricted not only by the fact that even the most unintelligent will recognize its low character, but by the fact that pity forbids us to laugh at genuine deformities. We could not laugh at a blind man or at a man on crutches, unless in such a case as, for example, that of an elderly man suffering from gout hopping in rage over the boards of the theatre. Here, however, the merriment arises not merely from the deformity as such, but from the fact that the man for a moment has been made into a mere object without the

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control of his own limbs. Deformity of another type appears in, let us say, the affectedly ridiculous dress of Malvolio or of the Gallicized fops of the Restoration period. These, taken along with Bardolph's nose, may lead toward a certain generalizing in regard to this type of the laughable. We laugh not so much at the mere physical deformities as at the deformities brought about by mental action or by foolish habit. Bardolph's nose arises from his propensity for drink, just as does the gouty foot of the old gentleman; Malvolio was not ridiculously garbed by nature, but by himself.

The principle of degradation, also, is to be seen partly in certain characters, partly in certain situations, of a type such as is presented in *The Spanish Fryar*. There the jealous little conceited money-lender is beaten and ill-treated; he has suffered a loss of dignity, and the degradation arouses our merriment. Of the same type is the degradation of the shrew or of the 'tamer tamed'; a degradation, however, that is not wholly physical, but rather arises out of the situation.

Physical incongruity is also a rich source of rather coarse merriment. The laughter or the smile that may come from the sight of a very tall woman alongside of her very diminutive husband is due to this. The sight of Titania, frail and ethereal, beside the ass-eared Bottom is equally risible, and for the same cause. It is because of this that in the music-halls of to-day we frequently find the comedians going in pairs; one excessively tall man going with an abnormally tiny one. Falstaff sails forward in his bulk with his little page following him, the contrast arousing our mirth because of the incongruity of the pair.

An example of physical automatism might be taken from *Sir Martin Mar-all*. There Sir John Swallow and Moody are placed on the top of several stools, one set on the other. They who have had most say in the moving forward of the plot have suddenly been made no better than machines,

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objects incapable of movement unless the other characters come to their assistance. The situation in itself is laughable, but the greater part of the merriment arises out of the physical positions of the two characters. Of a similar nature is the powerlessness of Katharina in *The Taming of the Shrew*: by her husband she has been reduced from a thinking being, independent and capable of action, into an automatic machine.

In surveying these scattered examples of laughter arising from physical causes, it is evident that we cannot always diagnose exactly the immediate source of our laughter, or, rather, that that laughter may take its rise from a variety of causes operating all at the one time. Thus physical appearance, character, situation, and words may all influence us, and automatism join with the sense of degradation. This is particularly true of physical attributes and of character.

LAUGHTER ARISING FROM CHARACTER.—In character we may find one of the richest and highest media for the arousing of laughter possible to the dramatist. Although comedy does not deal with personalities and with individualities as does tragedy, yet types of character form its basis. It is the presence of character that largely differentiates true comedy from farce.

Mental deformity is obviously one of the handiest themes for the comic playwright. This deformity may or may not be a vice, but it must be a folly. The stupid conceit of Sir Martin Mar-all or of Malvolio, the porcine stupidity of Dogberry and Verges, the irritating and irritated vanity of Petulant, all in a variety of ways give the dramatists opportunity for the introduction of the risible. M. Bergson has related all of these to his theory of the automatic, averring that our laughter comes, not from the sense of the mental deformity, but from the sense that the particular figure is, as it were, in the hands of his deformity, that none of those

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persons mentioned above are men, but merely machines in the control of their 'humours.' It does not, of course, precisely matter which name we give to it, but the truth probably lies between the two theories. It is possible that our laughter arises from a double source, and that the automatism and the deformity are both present to our minds subconsciously in the very midst of our laughter. Mr Sully has well pointed out in connexion with this laughter arising out of the sight of mental deformity that our laugh is not by any means a moral laugh. Our merriment is not by any means confined to vices ; it is directed against eccentricities, against extremes of any kind. It is applied, therefore, as heartily to virtues in an exaggerated form as to vices.

Mental incongruity is another prime source of merriment, either incongruity within one character (inner conflict) or between two characters (outward conflict). A typical scene of the inner incongruity is presented by Shakespeare when he brings in Sir Hugh Evans, stripped, and preparing for a duel with Dr Caius. We know Evans for a mild and inoffensive schoolmaster, and the sight of him here, alternately lunging at an imaginary enemy and falling on his knees for fear, is truly laughable. More commonly, as we have seen, the incongruity is presented not as an inner conflict, but as a contrast between two eccentric figures. The comic characters in the plays of the manners school usually enter in pairs. Petulant is opposed to Witwoud ; Sir Martin Mar-all is opposed to Sir John Swallow. So in Shakespeare there is Autolycus and the Clown ; Stephano and Trinculo ; Touchstone and Jacques. Here obviously there is a very mixed cause for our laughter, the characters contributing something in themselves, much more in conjunction, with words and situation playing almost equal parts.

Mental automatism may perhaps be differentiated in a way from mental deformity. Sir Martin Mar-all's conceit is a

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true mental deformity, but his mere repetition of certain phrases—" *In fine* " being the most famous—is not exactly a deformity, but a piece of sheer mechanical utterance. It is possible, of course, that no strict division can be made between the two, but there is apparently a slight variation between the confusion of words, such as we find in Mrs Malaprop, due to true mental deformity, and this automatic repetition of familiar, if often meaningless, phrases.

LAUGHTER ARISING FROM SITUATION.—The situation, however, as forming the basis of the plot of any comedy, presents to the dramatist possibly the very fullest opportunity for the introduction of the laughable. The physical person and the character are nearly always shown not isolated, but in the midst of some other persons, in a situation itself of an amusing character. On the other hand, it must be remembered that mere comedy of situation will lead to nothing but farce; that, although an audience looks to situation far more than to character or to words, situation offers an opportunity only for the introduction of a very limited kind of laughter.

Countless are the situations based upon the principle of degradation. Several examples of these have already been cited above. Stripping the dignity from a set of circumstances, dragging down the seriousness of a situation to trivial realms, will always awaken our merriment. It is amusing to watch the situations in which Falstaff finds himself with the " merry wives " ; it is amusing to see the pert Malvolio divested of his dignity and 'immured in a mad-cell. We could pass through the whole range of English comic drama and discover but a small percentage of comedies which have not in some way or another made use of this device.

The situation of incongruous circumstances is no less common. When Theseus is faced with the play of Pyramus and Thisbe the situation is incongruous. There is a certain incongruity in the second act of *The Way of the World*



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when we discover Mirabel walking off with Mrs Fainall, and Fainall with Mrs Marwood, both for the purpose of upbraiding their mistresses. This incongruity evidently may arise out of the events themselves, or out of the conflict between the character and the events, or out of the contrast of two persons, who may be both eccentric, or one eccentric and the other normal, or both normal. The example given from *The Way of the World* may be taken as representing the last mentioned. Incongruity arising out of the normal and the eccentric occurs in the famous serenade scene of *Sir Martin Mar-all*; and a scene of two eccentric characters in conflict is that duel episode already mentioned from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The variations in which any of these may actually appear are, quite obviously, infinite.

A situation involving M. Bergson's theory of automatism depends, on the contrary, almost entirely on the events. The characters are in the grip of the machine, powerless to alter or to shape their destiny. In this way the repetition of the same or of a similar scene leads toward a sense of the mechanical. There is this effect in the second act of *The Way of the World*, just as there is in several scenes of *The Comedy of Errors*. Here, too, enters what M. Bergson has styled the *interférence de séries*, the placing of one theme upon another. This method of securing laughter has not, probably, been so fully utilized in comedy as it has been in the novel, possibly because of the difficulty of presenting in comedy the two series in an equally elaborated form. Mark Twain can obtain a finely ludicrous effect in *The Innocents Abroad* from the superimposition on the relics of ancient Rome of the modern American vitality and temperament. National humour and the genuinely absurd in situation and in character are in this book too, but the main source of the laughter in it comes from its general scheme. This *interférence de séries* has certainly been used by a number

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of comic dramatists, but always in a somewhat modified manner. It appears in the second part of *Henry IV*, where the Falstaff scenes are, as it were, superimposed upon the scenes of genuine heroism. It appears similarly in the contrast between the artisans and the noble Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and it appears in *Much Ado about Nothing*, where the Dogberry and Verges episodes are run into the episodes of Leonato and his company.

The sense of liberation occurs in comic situation also, but, because of its often cynical and blasphemous effect, tends to appear only in restricted periods of dramatic output. The indecent situations in the Restoration comedy are laughable when regarded from this point of view ; they are nauseous if regarded from the standpoint of strict morality. Dryden's satirical references to the Church and to deity in *The Spanish Fryar* are amusing if we do not look upon them from the definitely religious aspect. Both the one and the other are escapes—escapes from the trammels of civilization and of the Church. The natural man attempts in them to free himself for a moment from the fetters that have changed him from a savage to a clothed being in the midst of a series of laws and customs and conventions. Situations of this kind, however, are dangerous, and nearly all dramatists, except the *naïf* playwrights of the Middle Ages and the cynical playwrights of the age of the Restoration, have neglected them. They may occur in modern drama, but only in an exceedingly restricted and circumscribed form. As civilization advances it is probably more and more careful to prevent these sudden moments of liberation through reference to things which it habitually conceals.

LAUGHTER ARISING FROM MANNERS.—Along with the physical appearance, with the character, and with the situation goes what we may style manners. There is a *comique de mœurs* as well as a *comique de situation* and a

*comique de caractère.* The manners, of course, are often expressed through the medium of the situation and of the words, and they themselves are reflections of character, but very often they stand separately in a different category from the others.

Deformity of manners might be instanced by a lack of *savoir faire*. The awkwardness of a certain type of character in a circle of easy and refined figures is amusing; just as the awkwardness of a society lady in a circle of more natural but less polished working-class women is amusing. The lack of ease displayed by a conservative addressing a labour club and by a working man addressing a circle of more educated persons have both in them, when stripped of political or sentimental feelings, something of the ludicrous. The manners are not exactly deformed, but they are below the level, or out of the level, of the particular society or of the particular part of society.

Incongruity, of course, is present here as well, and it is difficult to say exactly where the one begins and the other ends. The introduction of the sailor Ben in Congreve's comedy, for example, is incongruous, and most of our merriment arises from the sense of this incongruity; part, however, certainly comes from the sense that his manners are not the manners of the people with whom he comes in contact. The laughter of the primitive peasant or of the civilized man at the manners of a foreigner may depend to a certain extent on incongruity, but more perhaps on the very difference in the manners themselves. The numerous introductions of foreign types, therefore, in comedy rely for their humorous effects partly on the one and partly on the other.

Added to this there is automatism. Here the effect may take one of several forms. The mechanical manners may be due to character, as in the case of Ben. They may, on the contrary, be due only indirectly to character; they may be taken directly from imitation of other manners.

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Sir Martin Mar-all is comic because he has attempted to adopt the airs and the actions of the French ; Sir Harry Wildair, in a similar way, although he is no fool as the other is, has something ludicrous about him because of his imitated customs. The manners of a character, however, may derive wholly, not from his own character or from any conscious imitation, but from the society in which he has been brought up. A lawyer who cannot escape from the atmosphere of the law ; a doctor who cannot escape from the spirit of medicine ; a professor who cannot escape from the university environment ; the old man who cannot see anything good in the newer age—all of these are amusing because in each case the man has become a machine at the mercy of those feelings and manners which have been placed upon him by his surroundings.

LAUGHTER ARISING FROM WORDS.—Finally, among the species of the unconsciously humorous in the theatre, there is the laughable that arises from the dialogue—*le comique de mots*. This comic spirit derived from the words in a play shares in point of importance a position equal to that held by character and by situation. The word reveals the character ; it explains and intensifies the ridiculousness of a situation. Comedy of a type may exist without words, like the mimetic pantomime, where physical appearance and gesture made up for the silence of the piece ; but such comedy must by its very nature be not only temporary, but purely farcical. The gesture can express but an infinitesimal part of the thoughts and of the desires of the figures upon the stage.

The deformed word, if we may speak of such, finds its typical example in the speeches of Mrs Malaprop, but Mrs Malaprop is only one of a number of characters who, before her, spoke in a similar strain. This deformity of language, naturally, combines with incongruity and other

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forms of the laughable for its full effect. The most amusing of Mrs Malaprop's phrases are those where there is not merely a simple deformation of the word, but where the deformed word has itself a significance wholly incongruous, where there is raised a contrast between the idea (the word that was meant) and the object (the word as it was uttered). The merely deformed is not always even amusing, either in words or in persons, and the finer dramatists have always endeavoured to add to the effect by blending together this and some other forms of the comic.

Incongruity of words is, as must be evident, still more ridiculous than mere maltreating of them. Unconscious incongruity must here, of course, be carefully distinguished from conscious incongruity, which is wit. The introduction of, let us say, a hearty swear-word in a company of refined and delicate maiden ladies will have an incongruous effect, but it may be perfectly unconscious in the sense that it springs naturally from the lips of some character innocent of the dissonance he creates. So there is incongruity of words and of situation in Farquhar's *The Constant Couple*, where the words of one sphere of life are uttered to a person of another sphere, the one character not understanding the meaning of the other. Wit and unconscious word-humour may, of course, meet together, as in that scene of *The Double Dealer* between Careless and Sir Paul Plyant :

*Careless* : Alas-a-day ! this is a lamentable story ; my Lady must be told on't ; she must, i' faith, Sir Paul ; 'tis an injury to the world.

*Sir Paul* : Ah ! would to Heaven you would, Mr Careless ; you are mightily in her favour.

*Careless* : I warrant you ; what, we must have a son some way or other.

*Sir Paul* : Indeed, I should be mightily bound to you if you could bring it about, Mr Careless.

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There are here quite a number of reasons for our laughter at such a passage. There is the innuendo in the situation itself; there is the wit of Careless, conscious and assured; and there is the incongruity in the words of Sir Paul, between what he says and what he actually thinks.

Incongruity of words, in a manner somewhat similar to the above, is also utilized largely by comic dramatists in a very special form. Countless are the situations in comedies ancient and modern where two humorous characters have failed to understand one another. There is not here the contrast between wit and the ridiculous, but between two ridiculous elements, the real fun arising out of the incongruity of the words utilized by each. Examples of this are common from the days of Shakespeare to the days of Sheridan.

Automatism in the use of words is closely bound up with what is generally known as *le mot de caractère*, the word that expresses the mentality of a particular person, but it may at times be differentiated from that. As we have seen above, the “*In fine*” of Sir Martin Mar-all is in a way such a mechanical phrase, and his insistence on the “plot” is another. Occasionally in a comedy one word or one phrase occurs again and again in varying senses and forms as if it were a machine with a motion of its own driving over the characters themselves. Mere automatism of this sort, however, is rare, and usually, as in the example of character and of situation noted above, it is bound up with incongruity and with kindred sources of the risible.

WIT.—This consideration of the unconscious humour of words leads us to a glance at the conscious variety of the same species. The *bon mot*, as we have seen, depends upon incongruity, but it is sharply differentiated from the unconscious incongruity of words. *Bon mot*, *esprit*, wit—these are the moods and expressions of a highly intelligent man playing with his fancies, and with the discrepancy and incongruity



of his fancies, for the delectation of himself and of others. The playwright, of course, the creator, may be exercising the faculty of wit all through the composition of his particular work ; but wit in the theatre appears only in certain clearly defined characters of a highly intellectual and fanciful cast of thought. The prime example of such is the figure of Mirabel. His *bons mots* do not depend on situation, and only indirectly do they express his own character. Fainall and he play with words as they would play a game at cards :

*Fainall* : Not at all ; Witwoud grows by the knight, like a medlar grafted on a crab : one will melt in your mouth, and t'other set your teeth on edge ; one is all pulp, and the other all core.

*Mirabel* : So one will be rotten before he be ripe ; and the other will be rotten without ever being ripe at all.

All these words and fancies are independent of time and of place and of character. They are the deliberate gambollings of a mind swift and rich in fancy, tutored by long practice to ease and facility of expression.

Although this wit is one of the highest excellences in a comedy it must be confessed that often, especially when it appears in excess, it may ruin the true comic spirit in the theatre. The dangers in its use lie in the facts that the *esprit* or *bon mot* may be placed in the mouths of characters wholly unfitted to give expression to genuine wit, and that the dramatist, in his continual endeavour to keep up the sparkle and the brilliance, may become in the end merely wearisome and monotonous. We cannot fail to appreciate the diamond-like quality of *The Way of the World* or of *The Importance of being Earnest*, but in both we feel there is something lacking. There is lacking not only true delineation of character, but situation of a truly amusing kind. All the wit is on the surface ; it does not penetrate deeply into

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the core of the drama. What is the plot of *The Way of the World*? There is none. What are the characters? Mere puppets, the mechanical mouthpieces for the utterance of the conceits of the author. What are the situations? Weak and uninteresting, relieved only by the brilliance of the dialogue.

Wit, therefore, we may say, although it is one of the highest types of comic expression, when presented in an exaggerated form kills the play in which it appears. It carries the artificiality which is present in all high comedy to a point of absurdity, so that we can feel in no way the connexion between the figures on the stage and real life. Comedy in this presents the same phenomenon as was presented by tragedy. Just as in tragedy there was a union of high ideality and a profound realism, so in comedy do we find an intense artificiality in the presentation of types and of situations, but at the same time an ever-present relationship established between that seeming artificiality and the world outside the theatre. *The Way of the World*, therefore, although it is probably the most brilliant comedy of wit we possess, fails when placed alongside of the truly richer and more profound drama, *Love for Love*.

HUMOUR IN COMEDY.—Humour, likewise, has been found to differ from the unconsciously ludicrous, and from the conscious play of fancy as expressed in wit. Wit is brilliant; humour never so. Wit is clear and refined and cultured; humour is whimsical. Wit is modern in its expression and aristocratic in its tone; humour has always some half-wistful glance at the past and is generally humble in its utterance.

Humour gives always to comedy a mellowed note that stands in strange contrast to the hardness and insensibility of the play of wit. In it, as we have seen, sentiment and intellect are united; a spirit of kindness meets with a spirit

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of satire. "The fault of Shakespeare's comic Muse," says Hazlitt, "is that it is too good-natured and magnanimous . . . I do not, in short, consider comedy as exactly an affair of the heart or the imagination, and it is for this reason only that I think Shakespeare's comedies deficient." This criticism is penetrating, but it tends to lose sight of the fact that there are in comedy many totally divergent species, dependent in their turn upon the diverse types of the ludicrous. *The Taming of the Shrew* depends on the ridiculous situation and is a farce; *Volpone* depends on the satire; *The Way of the World* depends on the *bon mot*; *Love for Love* depends on manners and on character; *Twelfth Night* depends on humour. This comedy of humour is as important a species as any of the others, and, moreover, it has to be judged on its own standards, not by reference to other different types of comic productivity. The fact that kindness and a certain broader aspect of mankind (Hazlitt's "good-natured and magnanimous" elements) appear in it should not blind us to its real excellences. The fact that its serious undertone often reaves away from it the spirit of pure laughter must not make us rule it out of the realms of comedy proper.

Humour, naturally, may appear in comedy in many different ways. The humour of character is to be discovered in its fullest form in the person of Falstaff. Falstaff is highly intellectual; at the same time there is in him just sufficient of emotion and of whimsicality to turn him from a wit into a humorist. He is fat and he laughs at his fatness. There is more than a hint that he runs away at Gadshill solely for the pleasure of indulging in the exquisite joke of the lie. He poses continually for the sake of arousing laughter. He does not make fun exclusively of others; he himself is the butt of his own wit. It is quite sufficient to compare Falstaff with any of the heroes of

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Congreve to see the vast gulf that lies between the two. Mirabel would never dream of laughing at himself; he is too self-assured, too unemotional, ever to dream of such a thing. It is Falstaff's main pleasure and joy in life so to indulge in pleasantry at his own appearance and at his own habits.

Humour may be displayed also through the media of the situations, of the words, and of the manners. The situation in which Bottom finds himself is not amusing because of the character of Bottom, for he is not Falstaff; it is amusing because of the whimsicality with which it is presented, the mirth arising out of the manners and out of the situation. *Twelfth Night* presents examples of the same or a similar type. Shakespeare, indeed, has so plumbed the depths of this species of comedy that no more detailed analysis of it need here be given.

SATIRE.—Finally, we come to that even less amusing species of the comic spirit—satire. Satire, as has been pointed out, can be so bitter that it ceases to be laughable in the very least. There is nothing to laugh at or even to smile at in the severity of Juvenal. There is hardly a laugh in the whole of *Volpone*, save in that scene where the English Lady Politick Would-be enters with her affected airs and her vanity. Satire falls heavily; it has no moral sense; it has no pity or kindness or magnanimity. It lashes the physical appearance of persons, sometimes with unmitigated cruelty. It attacks the characters of men, as in *The Alchemist*. It strikes at the manners of the age with a hand that spares not. Witness the follies and the vices laid bare in the last-mentioned play of Jonson's; or glance at the terrible pages of Swift's last voyage to the country of the Houhyhnmns. It continually presents duplicity and vice, and delights to witness that duplicity and that vice overturned in the end. Mosca and

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Volpone, Corbaccio and the rest, are sent screeching to their doom.

There is always a certain vulgarity in true satire; and there is always a sense that the poet before writing has looked into his own heart. He is horrified at the vices he sees in himself. This note is deeply stressed in Jonson's plays; it is apparent in Swift; and it occurs in a very marked form in Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*. Most commonly, satire perceives underneath the specious disguise of social conventions and nominal morality the native brutality and ignorance of mankind; and in exposing this brutality and this ignorance to the view of the world there is a special coarseness and roughness in its treatment. This explains the hideousness of Wycherley's play, as well as the awful nature of Swift's last works. Pure comedy largely grows out of the acceptance of social conventions and the presentation in an amusing form of any variations from the normal custom. Satire lashes the customs of society as well as the eccentricities of individuals.

In this rapid glance at the nature of comic motives as expressed in comedy there are several important points which have become apparent. (1) There are at least four main types of comic expression used by the dramatists; the unconsciously ludicrous, the conscious wit, humour, and satire. (2) These may be mingled all together in one individual comedy, the highest forms of comedy usually combining at least two or three. (3) The laughable may, and indeed generally does, depend not on one source of merriment, but on several, so closely intertwined that it is almost impossible to disentangle them and to analyse them separately. (4) Comedy does not necessarily depend upon laughter, although laughter is assuredly its most common characteristic. Both in humour and in satire the purely risible may be entirely, or almost entirely, absent.

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## (iii) TYPES OF COMEDY

These considerations may serve us toward the making of a rapid analysis of the separate types of comedy. These varying types, because of the diverse and sharply differentiated species of the laughable, are much more clearly marked than the corresponding types of tragedy; but it must never be forgotten that they may and generally do fade almost imperceptibly into one another. In general, there are five main types of comic productivity which we may broadly classify. Farce stands by itself as marked out by certain definite characteristics. The comedy of humours is the second of decided qualities. Shakespeare's comedy of romance is the third, with possibly the romantic tragi-comedy of his later years as a separate subdivision. The comedy of intrigue is the fourth. The comedy of manners is the fifth, again with perhaps a subdivision in the genteel comedy. Finally, outside these, and to be considered separately, there is the so-called sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century.

FARCE.—Farce we have already considered in general; and we have found that its main characteristics are the dependence in it of character and of dialogue upon mere situation. This situation, moreover, is of the most exaggerated and impossible kind, depending not on clever plot construction, but upon the coarsest and rudest of improbable incongruities. Except in the very flimsiest of such pieces, of course, it is rare to find a play that depends upon nothing but farcical elements; but we can roughly mark the preponderance of those characteristics in the dramas presented before us under this title. It is quite evident that Farquhar and Vanbrugh are more farcical than Congreve; that *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* are more farcical than *Twelfth Night*. In these plays

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character is deliberately sacrificed to situation, nearly always of a rough-and-tumble type. Horseplay rouses our laughter in them more than the *comique de caractère* or the *comique de mots*. The situations in them are not subtle. There is, for example, nothing farcical in the famous screen-scene of *The School for Scandal*. That situation, because it has been cleverly arranged, and because it is interrelated with the characters of the *dramatis personæ*, is eminently and purely comic in the highest sense of the word. The coarse discoveries and confusions, on the other hand, of any of the lower and minor Restoration comedies are as genuinely farcical. The situations here have usually nothing of poignancy in them; the amusement that is extracted from them depends not upon what we might call the idea of the situation, on its connexion with the characters and with the general atmosphere of the play, but upon the physical characteristics of the situation itself.

THE COMEDY OF ROMANCE (COMEDY OF HUMOUR).—Farce, it is to be noted, may approximate in tone to any of the major types of comedy, or, rather, it may appear as a debased form of any of those types. It is thus distinct from each in this one quality of exaggerated situation, while all differ from it in an insistence upon something larger and broader than mere incident. The romantic comedy of Shakespeare, among the higher types, may here be considered first. In this term 'romantic comedy' are included all the chief comedies of Shakespeare from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to *Twelfth Night*,<sup>1</sup> the last three tragicomedies being of a slightly different tone and atmosphere. What do we find as the characteristics of these earlier dramas of Shakespeare? First of all, they are markedly separated from later comedies of other dramatists in their

<sup>1</sup> With the exception of *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Henry IV*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Merry Wives*.

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scene. Nearly all are set in natural surroundings—a wood near Athens for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a sea-coast town with flowering gardens for *Twelfth Night*, orchards and their surroundings for *Much Ado about Nothing*, the Forest of Arden for *As You Like It*. There is not a hint in them of those localities so dear to the later comic dramatists —‘Pall Mall’ or ‘St James’s Park.’ This scene, then, is peculiar in that it is of nature as opposed to the city, and in that it is set, not in the surroundings of English country life, but in the surroundings of a country life in some land remote in distance or in time. Athens, Illyria, Messina, and France —these carry the mind beyond even the ordinary city atmosphere of the theatre to a different age and to a different locality. This choice of district and of country was, on Shakespeare’s part, evidently intentional; he was following, it is true, the example of the romancers, Greene and Lyly, but a theory that would explain those scenes by mere imitation cannot be pressed too far. In following them he was perfectly conscious of what he was doing. He was evidently striving deliberately to conjure up an atmosphere suitable to the characters and to the emotions of his plays. It is in these characters that there appears the second noticeable element in this comedy of romance. Whereas some of the persons have a slightly more romantic colouring than the others, the majority are more or less realistically drawn, in the sense that they reflect the manners and the types of Elizabethan England. Sir Toby Belch is no more an Illyrian than Bottom is a citizen of Athens. Abstractly considered, such a sharp divergence between scene and character might be thought fatal to the production of any homogeneous work of art, but it is the triumph of the comedy of romance that it has overcome the many difficulties in its path. The main methods by which a unified effect has been secured are the general subduing of high tones, the

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utilization of humour rather than of wit, and the introduction thereby of feeling and of emotion into the body of the plays. In many ways it would be more correct to style this drama the comedy of humour ; and such a title might have been given to it, if that title had not raised a confusion between Shakespeare's comedy and the satiric comedy of Jonson, to the latter of which, rather erroneously, has been given the name of the comedy of 'humours.' Humour it is that preponderates in the earlier comedies of Shakespeare. Had wit appeared largely in these dramas, in all probability we should have seen markedly the discrepancy between the setting and the persons. Our reasons would have been constantly appealed to ; and, as a consequence, that romantic atmosphere of emotion, willing to be deceived and not over-critical, would have been destroyed. The subdued tone of all these pieces, going along with this prevalence of humour, is very noticeable. There is a continual series of half-lights, never brilliant gleams and dark shadows. The comic scenes of *Twelfth Night* may become rollicking at times, but they never grow so pronounced as the situations in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. There is everywhere an evident desire on Shakespeare's part to keep the colouring soft and uncontrasted. This softening process is marked in a multitude of ways. The wit that occasionally appears in the mouth of a character such as Rosalind is mellowed and chastened. It is never allowed free play ; if it begins to become scintillating then of a sudden a turn is made and there is a strong appeal to the feelings. Rosalind, moreover, is not a pure wit herself. Like all the heroes and the heroines of these comedies she is emotional rather than intellectual. Viola, Olivia, and the Duke in *Twelfth Night* are thus bound together in a circle not of wit, but of love ; so even Benedick and Beatrice, who crack their jokes about marriage, have a rich substratum of emotion in

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their natures, and this emotion prevents their wit developing along alien lines. The humour, however, is the surest medium for securing a spirit which might harmonize scene and character ; it is of a peculiarly meditative, fanciful, and kindly sort, romantic in its essence, if we connote by romantic the richer glow of a sentiment that is half poetical and half whimsical. All of these comedies of romance are full of appeals to our meditative faculties and to our emotions. The laughter is subdued into a kind of feeling of contentment, a happiness of spirit rather than an ebullition of outward merriment. Wherever the laughter is called forth it is immediately stilled or crushed out of existence by some other appeal.

In those plays, moreover, the laughter is softened and chastened by an element, usually carefully subordinated to the main plot, of evil or of misfortune. All along we know that this evil will be vanquished and that the misfortune will be put aside ; but it is ever present before us throughout the greater part of the plot. In *As You Like It* it is the banishment of a duke and his daughter ; in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* it is the hopeless entangling of the lovers' passions and the threat of execution that hangs over one of them ; in *Twelfth Night* it is the almost fatal neglect of Viola ; in *Much Ado about Nothing* it is the casting off of Hero. In two of these plays the evil and the misfortune are softened by the gaiety of spirit on the part of those ill-fated—Rosalind's happiness and Viola's cheerfulness. In the other two it is softened by the mirth of certain characters connected with, but standing apart from, the characters who appear to be in painful circumstances—by the mirth of Puck and of Bottom, of Benedick and Beatrice and Dogberry. It is here that there arises a distinction between the two types within this romantic species. We should not dream of calling *As You Like It* a tragi-comedy,

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but there has been considerable doubt in the nomenclature of *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. In these plays of Shakespeare's last years, closely connected in their spirit with the cognate dramas of Beaumont and Fletcher, the romantic element is still more deeply stressed. The scene is carried even farther than France and Athens and Illyria. It is ancient Britain, or Bohemia, or an island in the "Bermoothes." At the same time, the incidents are made still more improbable and 'romantic' to accord with the highly improbable nature of the setting. In *Cymbeline* there is the almost impossible chamber scene and the later wanderings of the heroine; in *The Winter's Tale* there is the sixteen years' concealment of Hermione; in *The Tempest* there is the atmosphere of magic. This endeavour thus to intensify the improbable and romantic notes is again evidently deliberate. It represents partly the exaggeration of the perfectly natural comedy of romance of Shakespeare's earlier years, partly an adaptation of that comedy of romance to the newer spirit of the early seventeenth century. The comedy of romance was an approximation or a balance between idealism and reality; in the later romantic comedy there is a loss of the reality altogether in scene and in situation, and partly in character. To harmonize with this, moreover, the tragic or the serious element, which had already appeared in the earlier plays but always in a subordinate position, is in those later dramas deeply stressed, so that the works cease to be comedies at all, taking on instead the characteristics of a decidedly mixed species. Thus, *Cymbeline* was set by the Folio editors as a tragedy; *The Winter's Tale* hovers on the brink of the unhappy; and the theme of *The Tempest* is a banished duke, involving scenes of serious and almost tragic sentiments. This heightened romantic note and increased tragic element mark out the Beaumont and Fletcher and the later Shakespearian

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romantic plays from the earlier Elizabethan group. There is also in the later type an added element of intrigue. The intrigue in the earlier plays was complicated, but in the later it is carried to lengths which are to be discovered among the former dramas only in isolated scenes. It is made more involved and takes on forms of evil lacking in the earlier type. The conspiracies of Iachimo and of Sebastian are quite apart in spirit from the complications in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Obviously the two groups run together, a play like *Much Ado about Nothing* standing between the one and the other in this respect; but in general they are sharply enough distinguished, and, while deserving treatment together, must be regarded as quite separate sub-species of the one type.

THE COMEDY OF 'HUMOURS' (COMEDY OF SATIRE).—Openly opposed to this general romantic species stands the so-called comedy of 'humours.' This class of comedy, which deals largely with exaggerated types or 'humours,' is one which, adumbrated in the classical comedy, was revived in England in *Gammer Gurton's Needle* and in *Ralph Roister Doister*, and then, after a not very glorious career, was rendered popular by Jonson in *Every Man in his Humour*. Of all the types of comedy this perhaps is one of the most confusing for critical analysis, mainly owing to the fact that all comedy, be it of 'humours' or of romance or of manners, deals with types of character rather than with personalities, and therefore employs what are, to all intents and purposes, the 'humours' which are often assumed to be the sole property of Ben Jonson. This being so, it may be inquired what precisely are those elements which particularly distinguish this type from others wherein the types of characters are likewise heavily marked. In the comedy of 'humours,' of course, the types are possibly more exaggerated than, for example, in the Shakespearian type of early romantic comedy. The fact that they are types is



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for ever being obtruded upon our notice, whereas, in the Shakespearian comedy, there is rather an attempt to conceal the presence of the types under a semblance of personality. On the other hand, none of the persons of Jonson's comedy is any more a type than is Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, and pronounced 'humours' appear frequently in the purest of the comedies of manners. Here, then, is not the prime distinguishing characteristic of the Jonsonian drama; the title which has been given to this drama is seen not to be fully justified. Only one claim can be made for its accuracy. In the comedy of romance as in the comedy of manners there are nearly always one or two characters of an ordinary intelligent kind, not marked by any particular folly or vice; there is in the comedy of 'humours' a tendency to make every one of the characters an eccentric of some kind or another. This tendency, however, again is seen not to be wholly universal. *Every Man in his Humour* has a fairly normal central figure in Young Knowell, and Shadwell's plays, deliberately modelled on the comedies of Jonson, possess always a couple or a quartette of ordinary *dramatis personæ* around whom move the more purely humorous figures.

The qualities which distinguish the Jonsonian type of comedy must, therefore, be sought for in aspects apart from the 'humours' themselves. These qualities are, in truth, not hard to discover. The Jonsonian comedy, in the first place, is marked off from the romantic drama by its intense realism. It was Jonson's boast and virtue that he drew comedy down from the improbable realms of romantic colouring to the levels of ordinary existence, where he could utilize

Deeds and language, such as men do use,  
And persons, such as comedy would choose,  
When she would show an image of the times,  
And sport with human follies, not with crimes.

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Jonson's great merit lies in the fact, not that he popularized the ancient comedy of 'humours,' not that he infused into English literature the spirit of Terence and of Plautus, or that he used Terence as an inspiration for increased dramatic effect, but that he drew comedy down to real life, presenting the classes and the follies of contemporary London at a time when there was a fear of comedy's vanishing altogether into those fantastic and impossible realms of make-believe which had been popularized by Shakespeare and by Beaumont and Fletcher. All of Shakespeare's dramas, except *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and the comic scenes of the first part of *Henry IV*, had dealt either with crude absurdity of accident, or with the humorous that arises out of natural ignorance, all coloured with his rich romantic imagination. *The Merry Wives* is farcical as is *The Taming of the Shrew*, and the Falstaff scenes of *Henry IV* not only depend largely upon humour for their effect but merely form part of a larger history. *Love's Labour's Lost* has a fanciful theme with nothing in it reminiscent of Jonson's style. Realism, added to intensified 'humours' treated in a satirical spirit, was first given to the theatrical world by Jonson. Here, possibly, a remark might be made concerning Jonson's matter. He has been called by several critics the founder of the comedy of manners; it has been said that he dealt with the manners of mankind, and so stands as the ancestor of the Restoration comedy. Such statements, however, go far toward confusing the issue, on the one hand, between Jonson and Shakespeare, and, on the other, between Jonson and Congreve. Jonson, in point of fact, deals hardly at all with manners as such: he is not concerned with the social affectations of the world, but with the follies of particular men or of particular groups of men. The comic of *Every Man in his Humour* rises out of the follies of Bobadill, of Matthew, of Cob, of Clement,

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not out of the manners of their class. All the 'humours' of *Every Man out of his Humour* are based on genuine traits of character, not on the customs and the ways of mankind. So in *The Alchemist* it is the gullibility of fools and the cunning of sharpers that is presented: in *Volpone* it is the natural greed of all types of men. So far, indeed, is Jonson from being the founder of the comedy of manners that it might almost be averred that his species of comedy is distinguished from several other types by the fact that it puts its stress not on manners, but on natural idiosyncrasies. It is this fact that he does not reproduce the manners of the age that marks off Shadwell, the literary descendant of Jonson, as being a writer, not only of an inferior genius, but of a class different from that of Etherege. In only two things does Jonson stand connected with the later comedy of manners—in his realism and in his satire; and we shall find that the realism and the satire of Jonson are definitely separated at many points from the similar qualities that occasionally appear in the Restoration dramas.

The comedy of 'humours,' be it noted, habitually disregards humour; it depends occasionally on wit, but more generally on satire. The exaggeration of the types gives ample opportunity for the introduction of this last comic method—indeed, in itself it is partly a manifestation of satirical creativeness. This distinction between the plays of Shakespeare and the plays of Jonson is clearly to be seen when we glance at the development of the dramatic productivity of each Humour, as it advances, tends to become more mellow, moving either toward increased kindliness or toward excessive meditation of a highly contemplative kind; satire, on the other hand, tends to grow more bitter and more severe. Humour may end in melancholy; satire nearly always ends in pessimism. Whereas in Shakespeare's work we see a continued kindliness and, at the close of his life,

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a melancholy contemplation of the shadows and of the shows of life, in Jonson we find a regular progression from the comparatively genial atmosphere of *Every Man in his Humour* to the bitterness and the unconcealed contempt of *Volpone*. As is evident, this lack of humour in the so-called comedy of 'humours' marks one of the many anomalies in our literary nomenclature, due obviously to the rapid alteration in the significance of the terms employed by critical writers. It would be much safer to style Jonson's comedy the comedy of realism or the comedy of satire, differentiating it thus from the romantic comedy with its atmosphere of humour and from the later comedy of manners.

THE COMEDY OF MANNERS (COMEDY OF WIT).—The comedy of manners is, as its name suggests, an entirely different species from the comedy of Jonson. There may be 'humours' in the plays of Etherege, Congreve, Farquhar, and Vanbrugh, but those 'humours' are not stressed to the same extent as they are in Jonson's work; and there is, moreover, a marked change in their conception. In Jonson, as we have seen, the 'humours' are exaggerated traits of character. The very names of his *dramatis personæ* display this. Deliro, Sordido, Fungoso, Shift, in *Every Man out of his Humour*; Volpone, Corbaccio, in *The Fox*—these show the tendency of his creative activity. In the comedy of manners, on the other hand, the 'humours' are rarely such traits of character exaggerated. The 'humours,' if we retain the old term, are derived from the conventions, follies, and usages of social life. Novel and Lord Plausible in *The Plain Dealer*; Lord Froth and Sir Paul Plyant in *The Double Dealer*; Witwoud and Petulant in *The Way of the World*; the Sir Harry Wildairs and the Lady Betty Modishes of the eighteenth century—all of these are figures who take their humorous complexion from the social follies of their day, not from the innate follies of

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mankind. Greed is not much represented in the comedy of manners, but it is in Jonson's plays, precisely because greed is a trait of character, not a quality derived from social custom.

The title given to this type of drama—the comedy of manners—is, of course, derived ultimately from the manners, the social follies and conventions, presented in the plays of the time; but the word manners itself has a deeper, and for our purpose a more illuminating significance, a significance which may serve us toward a closer analysis of the characteristics of this species. In the second act of *The Double Dealer* Lady Froth is conversing with Cynthia. “I vow Mellefont's a pretty gentleman,” she says, “but methinks he wants a manner.” “A manner!” exclaims Cynthia. “What's that, madam?” To which Lady Froth's answer is instructive. “Some distinguishing quality,” she replies, “as, for example, the *bel air* or *brilliant* of Mr Brisk; the solemnity, yet complaisance of my lord, or something of his own that should look a little *jene-sca-y-quoysh*.” This quotation shows to us that we have something more in the term ‘comedy of manners’ than at first sight meets the eye. Manners may mean simply the ways of men, in which case it will apply to the Jonsonian comedy as to this of the Restoration. It may mean the conventions of an artificial society; and it may mean something brilliant about men and women, not a ‘humour’ derived from natural idiosyncrasy but a grace or a habit of refined culture, something that looks “a little *jene-sca-y-quoysh*.” In these last two senses it is to be applied only to the comedy of Etherege and of Congreve.

The matter and the characters, therefore, of the Restoration plays differ markedly from the matter and the characters of the comedy of Jonson. In scene, however, both are alike. Not a single one of the true Restoration comedies

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of manners is set out of the bounds of London. Sedley mixes fanciful with real names in his *Bellamira*, and seems in so doing to spoil his play, but the finer dramatists of the time were careful to avoid any such admixture. They clung firmly to the circle of London society. As soon as the comedy of manners passed out of the town into the country, as it did in Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*, it was doomed to perish. It never could have travelled to the mythical lands of the Shakespearian Thalia; it would have withered there, as a hot-house plant in a freer atmosphere. In places, too, the Restoration comedy shared the spirit of Jonson, but, in sharing that spirit, altered it. Jonson's dramas, as we have seen, had been built on satire, which is an integral part of the comedy of manners. This satire, however, in its reappearance was totally changed. It was no longer the satire of the self-opinionated and slightly pessimistic individual as with Jonson, but the gentle satire of the fine world at the follies of those who strove to enter into its elegant circle. It directed its laughter at the hangers-on, at the fops, and at the would-be wits, at the coxcombs and at the pedantries of the *virtuosi*. Except in "manly Wycherley," who "lashed the crying age," it never grew bitter, never passed beyond a kind of fastidious contempt. The comedy of manners, moreover, did not confine itself to satire; it utilized far more what Jonson barely knew—the power of wit. Jonson's is the satire of exaggeration; he attains his effect not by means of a fruitful fancy, but by means of crude and heavy blows. The comedy of manners neglected all that. It was airy and delicate; and accordingly preferred to satirize by utilizing that species of *esprit* which depended fundamentally upon the incongruity between two ideas or between an idea and an object. Its method is entirely different from the method of the Elizabethan writer; as different, indeed, as that latter



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method is from the genial, kindly, and meditative humour of Shakespeare.

In discussing the comedy of manners, it is almost inevitable that there should arise the question of morality. The typical plays of the comedy of manners produced during the time of the Restoration are so full of indecencies of word and thought and situation that this problem must be ever present before us. Already some few words have been said on the subject, and little more need be done here than to point out that these comedies, written in the age of the Restoration, could not fail to be indecent to modern eyes. It is by no means the comedy of manners that has a monopoly of immorality at that time. All the types of comedy produced between 1660 and 1700 are stained by the brush of the evil of their time. Indeed, it may be said categorically that there are far worse elements to be found in the lesser-known non-manners dramas of that period than there are in the more accessible plays of Etherege and of Congreve. It is certainly noticeable that a man like Shadwell, in *The Squire of Alsatia*, where he deliberately adopts the Jonsonian style, is inexpressibly vulgar, while in *Bury Fair*, where he has been undoubtedly influenced by the plays of Etherege, he is comparatively pure and modest, even if judged by modern standards of taste.

Before passing judgment on this comedy of manners for its moral delinquencies, there are several things which must be borne in mind. First of all, the comedy of manners is essentially intellectual; it permits of the introduction and expression of practically no emotion whatsoever. It therefore does not play upon our feelings in any way, but appeals primarily and always to our reason. Its wit is purely intellectual; and the appreciation of it comes from our minds, not from our hearts. This intellectual quality in the works of Etherege and of Congreve undoubtedly renders

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their indecencies and their vulgarities comparatively harmless. The truly immoral book is that which plays upon our emotions and leaves the reason severely alone. The indecencies in the Restoration drama rarely, if ever, are introduced except for the purpose of raising a laugh from the wit with which they are presented. There is here a genuine insensibility demanded from the audience, and that insensibility dulls and renders innocuous what might otherwise have been of evil effect.

The comedy of manners, moreover, has stressed deeply that tendency in all high comedy—the artificiality of personality and of theme. This comedy is realistic, but not in the way that Jonson's plays were realistic. In his works there is a decided attempt to display through the 'humours' or through the types traits of contemporary life; there is a mass of topical allusion, and the subjects are often taken from real aspects of his time. The comedy of manners also reflects real life, but it is a real life artificialized, and, still further, it is the airier, what we might almost call the more spiritual, parts of real life. It is this fact which Lamb seized upon in his essay on "The Artificial Comedy." This essay is exaggerated, and therefore loses some of its effect; but it has captured the truth concerning this particular species of dramatic effort. There is an incessant attempt on the part of Etherege and of Congreve to delineate the more refined aspects of their time—the gaiety, the wit, the delicacy of the age. There is, too, the attempt to artificialize the manners presented, or else to present them in their most etherealized forms. While we may say, then, that this drama is realistic in that it presents a picture of contemporary life in definitely metropolitan surroundings, we must qualify that statement by declaring that it presents a picture only of certain aspects of that contemporary life, and that it treats those aspects in a peculiar way of its own.

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There is, finally, another consideration. Comedy, as we have already seen, is largely the laughter of society at certain abnormalities or eccentricities. The society of the Restoration was a peculiarly constituted society unlike that either of our own time or of the age of Elizabeth. What it regarded as an eccentricity, therefore, might not by any means correspond to our idea of such. If we are to regard this comedy aright we must as far as possible put ourselves back in the position of the upper-class life of the late seventeenth century. We must endeavour to secure the true historical point of view. We must recognize that for this age and particularly for this society such a figure as a jealous husband was truly comic, because abnormal and eccentric. The jealous husband, therefore, could be presented only as a theme of comic merriment; the deceiving of him could be introduced only as a jest. What for us might be a pitiful subject, or even a terrible subject, could be then only a source, and a genuine source, of laughter.

While, accordingly, we cannot deny that there are for us to-day many passages in the works of Etherege and of Congreve which must appear as vulgar and indecent, it behoves us to try honestly to recapture the spirit of that comedy, and, further, to relate the laughable in that comedy to the manifestations of the comic in other times and places.

THE GENTEEL COMEDY.—The comedy of manners as such, to all intents and purposes, was killed in the early eighteenth century by the passing away of the particular society which had given it birth. Congreve, its high priest, was truly born twenty years out of his due time. The comedy of manners, certainly, endured still in an altered form. In its original shape it was killed by the inrush of sentimentalism, but it continued in the guise of what was styled in the eighteenth century as genteel comedy. This genteel comedy is the comedy of manners adapted to the

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less natural society of the century that followed that of Charles II. The term was first used, apparently, by Addison in the very years that saw the development of the type, but it is explained nowhere more clearly than in the anonymous introduction to the third volume of *The Modern British Drama* (1811). *The Careless Husband* of Cibber is there described as "the first genteel comedy upon the English stage, and the precursor of a numerous class of plays, which did not, as formerly, represent the operation of one single passion rushing with impetuosity to the accomplishment of its desires. It is not the natural, but the artificial state of man, which this species of drama presents; exhibiting characters not acting under the predominance of natural feeling, but warped from their genuine bent by the habits, rules, and ceremonies of high life." There is here, of course, a certain misapprehension, probably due ultimately to Addison, but the characteristics thus diagnosed are the genuine characteristics of the genteel comedy. The age of Anne and the later age of the mid-eighteenth century were both sentimental and less natural than the age of Charles. They were still prevailingly intellectual, but the vast changes which had taken place in the years following the Revolution of 1688 had left their marks on society and on the theatre. The age, too, was more effeminate than it had been before. Affectations ruled the life of the upper-class society, and it is these affectations that are reproduced in the pages of the genteel comedy. All that was virile in the earlier drama was lost, and, if the Restoration plays presented a more artificial state of society than had appeared in the plays of Jonson, this was as much more artificial than the comedies of Etherege and of Congreve. In the genteel comedy most of the indecencies which had, in the eyes of the moral critics, marred the earlier dramas were abandoned. Intrigue there is in plenty, but it is intrigue that is shrouded in the midst

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of the artificial, and, moreover, it is intrigue that is often highly sentimentalized. By the writer of the preface in *The Modern British Drama* Hoadly's *The Suspicious Husband* is singled out as a prime example of the later genteel comedy, and in that drama we find, in spite of the licence of the drinking and love-making scenes, a rich air of the sentimental. The coarser manners are toned down to an atmosphere of decorum, and if there may appear to our eyes a more vicious atmosphere in the hypocrisy of certain situations the cruder elements of licence have been cut away and their place taken by a strictly becoming spirit.

In this genteel comedy, however, there is something more than mere 'moral' tone that separates it from the earlier type of comic productivity. The wit which had distinguished the plays of Congreve has been in it largely lost. The laughter arises not out of the playful fancies of brilliant and highly intellectual men, but out of the affectations of this mannerized society. Lady Betty Modish and her gallants are not truly clever; they have wit of a kind, but they are laughable not so much by reason of their skill in repartee as by reason of their fine airs and their highly artificial mode of life. The heroes of the earlier comedy of manners are usually ordinary men—Careless and Courtine and Beaugard—who laughed at the follies of too refined affectation on the one hand, and of awkward ignorance on the other. Here the follies have become the central part of the picture, and the ordinary men have vanished.

THE COMEDY OF INTRIGUE.—Apart from the comedy of manners and its descendant, the genteel comedy, there is one type of comedy which has preserved an almost perennial existence during the whole period from its inception in the days of Fletcher to the end of the eighteenth century. This type is the comedy of intrigue. It is rarely perhaps that we find a genuine and pure comedy of this class; but there are

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innumerable plays which have a preponderance of the intrigue element, so that the type may be considered as an entity in itself. In this species of comedy, as the name implies, the laughter arises solely or largely out of the disguises and the intrigues and the complications of the plot. In some of the comedies of Fletcher, in those of Mrs Behn, and in those of Mrs Centlivre, the whole interest lies in the skilful manipulation of a series of situations delicately conceived and leading to innumerable mistakes and amusing *dénouements*. In general, this comedy stands far below those types we have been considering, being in its nature closely allied to farce. It differs from farce, however, in that it does not necessarily or even usually employ horseplay or rough incident in its development. Very often the complications of the comedy of intrigue lead to nothing but merely laughable situations, laughable because of the intellectual incongruity they present. There can be little wit in this type of drama, practically no humour, and not a scrap of satire, but there is the genuine comedy of situation highly and, in the best of the species, interestingly developed. This comedy of situation, as we have seen, has a distinct value of its own, and must be accorded an honourable place in the methods at the disposal of the comic dramatist. The danger in it lies in the fact that it becomes, in an exaggerated form, a trifle monotonous and gradually palls on the senses and on the intellect. It has also the disadvantage that, the novelty of the plot-development worn off, it often ceases to have any great value or interest for us. On the other hand, the comedy of intrigue is more universal than many of the other types. The intrigue that it presents is independent of time and of place; it exists in a world of its own. It does not paint the manners of a particular time; its theme is the sportive merriment of mankind. In studying it we have therefore to beware of falling into one of two extremes. We have to



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guard against condemnation because of the purely external nature of the interest, and we have to guard against excessive praise because of the skill with which many of these comedies are developed. The comedy of intrigue stands at the opposite pole of dramatic invention from such a play as *The Way of the World*. The one dwells entirely on external sources of laughter; the other is based solely on intellectual mirth. In the highest type of comedy, that which is most successful on the stage as in the study, we shall find in general a union of these two.

SENTIMENTAL COMEDY.—Finally, among the types of comic drama, there is that to which has been given the name of the comedy of sentiment. This type found its chief sphere of activity in the early and middle years of the eighteenth century, although it was inaugurated in the later decades of the previous century. An even more careful analysis is required of it than was demanded in the case of the other species already dealt with. In nearly all the sentimental comedies which we possess there are to be discovered one or two facts which must always be borne in mind by anyone who would study the development of the type and analyse its characteristics. In some comedies of sentiment we find the atmosphere of the comedy of manners warped and altered in the last act by means of some sudden revulsion of character or by some swift change in the conduct of the plot. Thus, in Cibber's *Love's Last Shift*, which tradition habitually acclaims as the originator of the species, although without due accuracy, the hero is an ordinary hero of the manners school, until in the end comes to him repentance and a new way of life. As Cibber himself in his apologetic epilogue explained to the critics, he was very moral at the close,

But then again,  
He's lewd for above four Acts, Gentlemen !

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On the other hand, we may discover a number of sentimental comedies where there is a marked line of demarcation between two parts of the plot, or between two groups of characters. There are countless plays, for example, of the species which combines thus a sentimental portion and a portion dealing entirely with intrigue, or, more commonly, with 'humours.' Thus, in *The Fugitive* of Joseph Richardson there is a distinctly sentimental theme dealing with Sir William Wingrove and his daughter Julia, whom he plans to give to Lord Dartford, but the surroundings of this theme are occupied entirely with the 'humours' of Larron, O'Donnel, and Admiral Cleveland. So, in *The Secret* of Edward Morris the sentimental is richly stressed in the rejection of Henry by Rosa because of her poverty, and in the subsequent rejection of Rosa by Henry because the latter has found that his sweetheart's poverty is due to the action of his own father, but the element of 'humours' in Lizard and his family provides all the comic spirit in the play.

"Provides all the comic spirit in the play"—here indeed lies the secret of the sentimental comedy. There is, in point of fact, no such thing as sentimental comedy at all. The sentimental parts of the plays called sentimental are purely serious; the situations are situations that raise a problem in our minds; the characters are almost always individualized. In true comedy Rosa and Julia would have been mere types, and we should not have cared what they did or felt; but in this sentimental comedy they are individualized, and at once their positions become pathetic or serious. Not for one moment do we even smile at the sentimental portions or at the sentimental characters; the mirth all comes in the Cibber type from the basis of manners, and in the later type from the sub-plots or sub-characters of the 'humours' or the intrigue species. In point of fact, although this seems to have escaped the notice of the critics,

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all that we mean by sentimental comedy is either a sentimental play (or *drame*) with an added element of mirth derived from manners or 'humours' or intrigue, or else a play of the ordinary manners type which ends on a moral note by causing a revulsion of character and by relating the position in the final act of the drama to the situations of real life. The sentimental comedy, therefore, is not a separate type of comic creation, but merely the name given to a particular union of the serious and the amusing.

Before closing this section a further note might be made concerning nomenclature. It has been plentifully apparent that not only in this last instance have the terms applied regularly by criticism to the types of comedy been misleading and erroneous. The comedy of 'humours' has nothing of humour in it: sentimental comedy cannot truly be said to exist. A plea might therefore be made for a new set of titles, based not on chance application, but upon a study of the comic methods employed by each species. Shakespeare's comedy might deserve the name of comedy of humour, for that is its predominant characteristic, giving birth to all the laughter in his dramas. Romantic tragi-comedy might serve for the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, in which a union of the serious and of the laughable is marked. Jonson's comedy would be the comedy of satire, dependent not upon wit, and innocent of humour. The plays of Etherege and of Congreve would, on the same principle, be the comedy of wit, the word manners, unless fully understood in all its bearings, merely causing confusion between the dramas of the Restoration and the dramas of the early seventeenth century. By thus clarifying the nomenclature of comic types and by bearing these titles in mind we might go far toward appreciating the fundamental characteristics of each separate species.

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## (iv) TRAGI-COMEDY

CHARACTERISTICS OF SENTIMENTAL DRAMA.—In the last section it has been seen that the sentimental in itself is never amusing, and that consequently it is not comic in the ordinary sense of that word. On the other hand, the sentimental plays are clearly differentiated from tragedy not only in having happy endings, but in presenting their matter in such a way that we are not thrilled and awed by the scenes set before us. This lack of thrill and of awe is the prime point of difference between the two. The sentimental drama, however, does appeal to our emotions rather than to our intellect, or else it combines a double emotional and intellectual appeal. The emotions that it appeals to are sympathy and pity. ‘Sympathetic’ tears and ‘sentimental’ tears are almost synonymous terms for the eighteenth century. In tragedy, as we have seen, pity and sympathy are largely absent because the figures presented on the stage are greater and more massive than ourselves. In sentimental drama, on the contrary, the attempt is always made to present life and the characters of life as these actually appear to us. Feelings may be artificialized to modern standards: sentimentalism may frequently connote an atmosphere of hypocrisy; but there is the genuine endeavour on the part of all the sentimental dramatists to create scenes of real life, those scenes of real life displaying a problem of some distinct and more or less poignant nature. This problem involves the assumption that art should be related to life, and therefore in the sentimental plays there is always a moral note. There is an element of preaching, of inculcating some moral or religious precept, which may be lofty or may be merely hypocritically self-seeking. In the two plays referred to above—and there is no need to multiply instances—the problem is duly stressed. In the one it is

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the relation between father and daughter, when the former desires to hurry the latter into what will quite evidently be a disastrous marriage; in the other, it is the relation between a lover and his *fiancée*, first when she is a poor ward and he the son of a rich father, and again when he discovers that she is poor because his father has cheated her of her money. In the more fully developed plays of the type the problem will certainly be more profoundly expressed, and the solution, if any, will be richer; but in all, crudely or artistically, it is present.

The fact that in this sentimental drama the characters are of real life renders the theme very close to the realm of comedy; but it must be carefully realized that the sentimental drama in itself lies as far from comedy as it does from tragedy. Comedy is non-moral, the sentimental drama is purposeful; comedy is largely intellectual, the sentimental drama is essentially emotional; comedy deals with types, the sentimental drama deals with individuals; comedy does not relate itself to the problems of life, the sentimental drama depends for its very being on this relationship. This particular type of drama, therefore, stands as a class by itself, separate both from high tragedy and from fine comedy. These latter two are connected by their ideality and by their level above real life; the sentimental is opposed to both in its actuality. It is here that there lies the greatest danger for the sentimental dramatist; the type is too ordinary. It is dragged down to a lower plane and cannot accordingly have that universality demanded by the finest art. It may be very moral and very interesting; pleas may be made for it from the days of Colley Cibber to those of Ian Hay, but it will always fail when tested by the highest standards. When given an unhappy ending, as in the domestic tragedies, it may, by a change of stress and of emotion, rise higher and acquire a fresh and a larger significance, but in its non-tragic form, dwelling on sympathy and pity and moral

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considerations, it is bound to be ephemeral and temporary. Even Shakespeare, utilizing something of its spirit in *Measure for Measure* and in *All's Well that Ends Well*, failed to produce plays that would stand the test of time as *Othello* and *As You Like It* have done.

OTHER TYPES OF TRAGI-COMEDY.—The question of tragi-comedy of the more marked types has already been touched upon. It has been seen that comedy could unite with genuinely tragic elements to create a truly great play. There may, however, in conclusion to this brief attempt at an analysis of dramatic characteristics, be given a word concerning the union of these two elements. In the first place it may be noted that the comic may appear in tragic plays for three very different purposes. It may be employed as a contrast to the tragic. In this case it very seldom raises a laugh. The porter scene in *Macbeth* is comic, but it is a grim sort of comedy that serves to make more terrible the events taking place within the castle. The comic may, on the other hand, be brought in as a relief rather than as a contrast. The servant scenes and the Mercutio scenes in *Romeo and Juliet* are an example of this. Here the comic is genuinely amusing and intended to be amusing, devised to form a breathing space, as it were, in the midst of the tragic action. Some of the jests of Lear's fool have the same purpose, although here the ideas of contrast and of relief seem inextricably intermingled. This relief has not been greatly practised by Shakespeare, although it has been a marked feature of many of the other early seventeenth-century dramas. It is just possible that he realized the difficulty it involves in regard to the final disposition of the humorous figures. Generally, these have to be got rid of by death; Mercutio is slain in *Romeo and Juliet*, and Bergetto in Ford's *'Tis Pity* is stabbed by mistake. The end of such characters, however, does not fill us



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with the genuine mood of tragedy. We feel that there is something wrong in their deaths; an element of doubt is raised, and doubt is fatal to the spirit of tragedy. Thirdly, the comic, apart from these, may be developed along lines of its own, parallel to the main plot and independent of it. In this case the contrast between the two moods or spirits almost invariably leads the playwright to disaster. We may have successful romantic dramas such as *The Winter's Tale*, where there are comic and serious portions, the serious ending not unhappily; but the union of an unhappy theme with mirthful comedy must always seem incongruous unless the comedy be relegated to a very inferior position. The excuse that most romantic critics and independent neo-classic critics have given for tragi-comedy—its truth to nature—must therefore be dismissed as unavailing. Truth to nature is not the test of drama; there are many things in nature which cannot be satisfactorily dramatized, and the union of the different moods of ordinary life must be carefully harmonized before they can be artistically included in one single play. Drama is based on life, but it is life selected and made harmonious. It presents the moods of our minds and hearts abstracted and placed in an intensified isolation. The drama has not only laws of its own, but characteristics of its own; it is human life and character raised and placed on a new plane of existence, where other laws and other customs rule than those on this earth. We cannot criticize this drama from the ordinary point of view of natural existence.

This independence of drama, realized so long ago by Aristotle, must appear one of the strangest peculiarities of this particular type of literature, for the drama, more than the majority of other arts, would seem to take its very life from the actions and the thoughts of mortal men and women. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, however much the

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theatre may attempt to depict human personalities, it must always show them in an idealized light, moving in a world of their own. This world can be fully understood only when we have endeavoured to investigate those elements which seem to be common to all the great dramatists. Herein, therefore, lies the *apologia* for this attempt, tentative and possibly fragmentary, to investigate, analyse and, as far as possible, classify the characteristics of that art which has charmed millions for centuries upon centuries, and has given to the world the profound genius of an Æschylus, a Sophocles, and a Shakespeare, as well as the gaiety and the wit and the laughter of a Terence, a Molière, and a Congreve.

## APPENDIX

### I. BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY OF DRAMATIC THEORY <sup>1</sup>

#### (i) GENERAL

IT is impossible to dissociate the study of dramatic theory from the larger study of literary criticism generally. The standard history of the whole subject is Professor Saintsbury's *History of Literary Criticism*. The portions devoted to English criticism have recently been abstracted from this and issued as a separate volume. As a companion book, the *Loci Critici* of Professor Saintsbury is exceedingly useful. In this work the most important critical passages of writers from Aristotle to Arnold have been collected and annotated. A full bibliography of literary criticism is to be found in Gayley and Scott's *Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism*. Two volumes in the "World's Classics" series present collections of critical essays; the first deals with early critical theory, the second with literary theory of the nineteenth century. For further study Spingarn's *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century* and his *History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance* will be found valuable. The various Elizabethan critical essays have been collected by Gregory Smith. Nichol Smith's *Eighteenth-century Essays on Shakespeare* (Maclehose) and the same editor's *Shakespeare Criticism* present the typical pronouncements on our master-dramatist by the neo-classicists and others. Durham's *Critical Essays of the Eighteenth Century* (Yale University Press) is a valuable detailed study of the ideals of this period.

#### (ii) INDIVIDUAL WORKS

ARISTOTLE.—The best translation of the *Poetics* is that by Professor Butcher. Butcher's notes should be carefully studied.

<sup>1</sup> It will be understood that nothing like completeness could be aimed at in either of these brief bibliographies. Indeed, "Suggestions for Reading in Dramatic Theory" would have been a more fitting title for each.

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In reading Aristotle the few remarks on the drama made by Plato should not be disregarded. These are scattered throughout his discourses, although the most important appear in *The Republic* ("Golden Treasury" series). On Plato's criticism there is a good essay by Pater in *Plato and Platonism*, and an interesting study by W. C. Green—"Plato's View of Poetry"—in *Harvard Studies in Philology*, vol. xxix.

Horace's *The Epistle to the Pisos* is well rendered by Saintsbury in his *Loci Critici*.

MEDIEVAL CRITICISM does not deal largely with drama, owing to the loss of that type of literature after the fall of the Roman Empire. Even Chaucer's definition of tragedy (quoted p. 54) does not strictly refer to dramatic form, but to tragic tales.

RENAISSANCE CRITICISM is well dealt with by Spingarn, *op. cit.* Castelvetro is very important, as is Vida. On these the later neo-classic writers of France and of England modelled themselves. A few extracts will be found in *Loci Critici*.

Sidney's *An Apologie for Poetrie* should be read in the reprint of Professor Arber. In this series also will be found the work of Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poetrie*, and of Webbe, *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, both of which, however, deal rather with poetry in general than with drama in particular.

Jonson wrote no system of criticism, but his ideas are to be seen in his *Timber, or Discoveries*, and in the prologues to his various plays. It should be noted that the judgments given in *Timber* are not wholly original, but, like those of Sidney, are very largely derived, even directly translated, from passages in preceding critics.

Boileau's *L'Art Poétique* should certainly be read before attempting any work on later seventeenth-century English critics. With this might be taken the *Réflexions sur la Poétique* of Rapin. Both of these have been well analysed by Saintsbury.

Dryden stands out as the first original English writer on literary theory. His essays have been excellently edited by Professor W. P. Ker, and the *Dramatic Essays* have been selected by W. H. Hudson for the "Everyman" series.

AUGUSTAN CRITICISM presents little of original material from the point of view of the drama. Rymer should be read to gain an idea of the severer form; Addison to gain an idea of the more mellowed, refined theories of the age; and Pope (*Essay on Criticism*) to gain an idea of the average rules taken over from the Continent

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and here laid down with epigrammatic force. Dr Johnson is important because of his defiant personality. Of his work several essays in *The Rambler* (see p. 26) ought to be read, as well as his prologue, spoken by Garrick at the opening of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.

ROMANTIC CRITICISM deals almost exclusively with poetry. Hazlitt is one notable exception. His *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* will be found in the "Everyman" series. Coleridge's *Notes on Shakespeare* ("Everyman") should also be consulted, and Thackeray's *The English Humourists* (ed. F. E. Bumby, Harrap).

MODERN CRITICISM has devoted more space to this subject. On comedy Meredith's *Essay on the Idea of Comedy* is important. Professor Bergson's *Le Rire* (Hachette; English translation, Macmillan) should be studied carefully, as well as Sully's *An Essay on Laughter*. There is a short essay on comedy by C. Palmer which presents some valuable suggestions. Reference might also be made to the new theories of the æsthetic of Benedetto Croce, and to the studies in psychology by Freud and others. Particular attention might be paid to the latter philosopher's *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious*. On tragedy W. L. Courtney's *The Idea of Tragedy* is valuable. Thorndike's *Tragedy* is rather historical than analytical. Professor Vaughan's *Types of Tragic Drama* is probably the best book on the subject we have. Brander Matthews' three works, *The Development of the Drama*, *A Study of the Drama*, and *The Principles of Playmaking*, should certainly be read, and there is some interesting material in Professor Lewis Campbell's *Tragic Drama in Æschylus, Sophocles, and Shakespeare*. As stated in the text, Maeterlinck's essay on "The Tragical in Daily Life," in *The Treasure of the Humble*, is an important piece of criticism. Since the writing of this book there has appeared a short but suggestive essay on *Tragedy* by Dr J. S. Smart, and a fuller analysis of comedy, *The Psychology of Laughter and Comedy*, by J. Y. T. Greig.

## II. BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECT DRAMATIC WORKS

### (A) GREEK DRAMA

#### (i) GENERAL

There is an interesting essay on Greek drama in Dent's "Temple Primers." *The Athenian Drama* by Professors G. C. W. Warr, J. S. Phillimore, and G. G. Murray presents a more detailed account. On the Greek stage Manzies' *History of Theatrical Art* and Flickinger's *The Greek Theater* might be consulted.

#### (ii) PARTICULAR WRITERS

ÆSCHYLUS has left seven plays: *Persæ*, *Seven against Thebes*, *Prometheus Bound*, *Suppliants*, *Agamemnon*, *Choephoræ*, *Eumenides*. These last three form a trilogy dealing with the theme of Orestes, and are often classed together as the *Oresteia*. A translation of all, by A. Swanwick, is published in the Bohn Library. Morshead's *House of Atreus* is also a fine translation of the *Oresteia*.

SOPHOCLES. Again, seven of this dramatist's plays are extant: *Trachiniæ*, *Ajax*, *Electra*, *Ædipus Tyrannus*, *Ædipus Coloneus*, *Antigone*, *Philoctetes*. There are besides a few scattered fragments of his 130 odd dramas. The translations by Sir R. C. Jebb and by R. Whitelaw are both excellent.

EURIPIDES. Of Euripides' 92 dramas, eighteen or nineteen have been preserved: *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, *Ion*, *Suppliants*, *Heracleidæ*, *Heracles Mad*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Troades*, *Helen*, *Phænissæ*, *Electra*, *Orestes*, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Bacchæ*, *Cyclops* (*Rhesus* is probably spurious). The best translations are undoubtedly those of Professor Gilbert Murray. An interesting rendering of the *Cyclops* is to be found in Shelley's works. The *Alcestis* appears in part in Browning's *Balaustion's Adventure*.

ARISTOPHANES wrote, it is said, about fifty-five comedies. Of these only eleven have been handed down to us: *Acharnians*, *Knights*, *Clouds*, *Wasps*, *Peace*, *Birds*, *Lysistrata*, *Thesmophorizusæ*, *Frogs*, *Ecclesiazusæ*, *Plutus*. There is a translation in six volumes, by B. B. Rogers.



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### (B) ROMAN DRAMA

SENECA, the most famous of the Roman tragic poets, has left ten plays: *Agamemnon*, *Hercules Furens*, *Hercules Œtæus*, *Medea*, *Octavia* (apparently spurious), *Œdipus*, *Phædra*, *Phænissæ*, *Thyestes*, *Troades*. These were translated into English in the second half of the sixteenth century, and have seen several renderings since that date. A handy translation is that of E. C. Harris. There is a well-written account of his work by F. L. Lucas, *Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy*.

TERENCE has six comedies: *Andria*, *Heauton Timorumenos*, *Eunuchus*, *Phormio*, *Hecyra*, *Adelphæ*. The text and translation are given in the Loeb Classical Library.

PLAUTUS is more plentifully represented than any of the others, there being twenty-one of his plays as well as various fragments extant: *Amphitruo*, *Asinaria*, *Aulularia*, *Bacchides*, *Captivi*, *Casina*, *Cistellaria*, *Curculio*, *Epidicus*, *Menæchmi*, *Mercator*, *Miles Gloriosus*, *Mostellaria*, *Persa*, *Pænulus*, *Pseudolus*, *Rudens*, *Stichus*, *Trinummus*, *Truculentus*, *Vidularia*. Five plays have been translated by Sugden.

### (C) ENGLISH DRAMA

#### (i) GENERAL

The standard history of English drama from the beginnings to 1714 is that of Sir A. W. Ward, although it has been superseded by other more detailed studies. A shorter account of the development of drama is given in Benjamin Brawley's *A Short History of the English Drama*.

#### (ii) MEDIEVAL

On the development of the mysteries see E. K. Chambers, *The Mediæval Stage*; F. Schelling, *Elizabethan Drama*; J. A. Symonds, *Shakespeare's Predecessors*; F. S. Boas, *Shakspeare and his Predecessors*. Gayley's *Representative English Comedies* contains specimens of this early work, as does *Everyman and other Mysteries* ("Everyman"). Professor A. W. Pollard's *English Miracle Plays, Moralities, and Interludes* is most useful.

# INTRODUCTION TO DRAMATIC THEORY

## (iii) PRE-SHAKESPEARIAN

W. A. Neilson's *The Chief Elizabethan Dramatists* gives some thirty Elizabethan plays of varying dates. This collection will be found exceedingly useful. Two volumes in the "Everyman" series—*Pre-Shakespearean Tragedies* and *Pre-Shakespearean Comedies*—provide a small series of interesting plays. There are many larger collections of early and Elizabethan plays (e.g., Dodsley's, Farmer's Facsimiles, Malone Society publications). The best edition of Lyly is that edited by R. W. Bond. A. H. Bullen has edited Peele's works (Stratford-on-Avon). Greene's plays appear in the "Mermaid" series, and have also been edited by J. Churton Collins. The best edition of Nashe is that of R. B. McKerrow. Marlowe's plays appear in the "Mermaid" series, and have also been edited recently by C. F. T. Brooke. On the early comedy preceding these University Wits see a pamphlet by A. W. Reed on *The Beginnings of the Secular Romantic Drama* (Oxford University Press, for the Shakespeare Association). Suggested short list for reading: (i) early interludes: *The Four P's*; (ii) early comedy: *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, *Ralph Roister Doister*; (iii) romantic comedy: Lyly's *Endimion*, Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*; (iv) Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and *Dr Faustus*; (v) Senecan drama: Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc*, Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. A study of some of Shakespeare's originals is also interesting as showing his methods; the anonymous *King Leir* ("Shakespeare Classics") and *The Taming of a Shrew* ("Shakespeare Classics") might be suggested in this connexion.

## (iv) SHAKESPEARIAN

The critical work on Shakespeare is so vast that only a few suggestions may here be made. In connexion with this book Professor Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* ought to be studied. Sir Sidney Lee's is the standard biography. Sir Walter Raleigh's volume in the "English Men of Letters" series, and Professor Dowden's *Shakespeare, his Mind and Art*, are also exceedingly suggestive.

## (v) CONTEMPORARIES OF SHAKESPEARE

The collection of Neilson referred to above will be found useful. The "Mermaid" series and the "Belles Lettres" series present interesting selections of plays. Schelling's *Elizabethan Drama*  
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is the standard history of the development of tragedy and comedy in this age. For one comparatively unacquainted with the drama of the period the following might be taken as a suggested course of reading :

(i) **Domestic tragedy** : *Arden of Feversham* ; Heywood's *The English Traveller* and *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (" Belles Lettres "). (ii) **Domestic comedy** : Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* ; Chapman's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. (iii) **Satiric comedy** : Jonson's *The Alchemist* (" Belles Lettres ") and *Volpone*. (iv) **Early comedy of wit** : Fletcher's *The Wild-Goose Chase*. (v) **Tragedy of horror** : Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* and *Antonio's Revenge* ; Ford's *'Tis Pity* and *The Broken Heart* (" Belles Lettres ") ; Webster's *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* (" Belles Lettres "). (vi) **Neo-classic tragedy** : Jonson's *Sejanus* (" Belles Lettres "). (vii) **Romantic tragedy and tragi-comedy** : Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, *Philaster*, and *A King and No King* (" Belles Lettres ").<sup>1</sup> (viii) **Burlesque serious drama** : Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (" Belles Lettres ").

It must be noted that this list presents merely a few plays possessing features discussed in the text of this book.

### (vi) RESTORATION

Sir A. W. Ward for this period is not so trustworthy as he is for the earlier time. Nettleton has a slight history of drama from 1642 to 1780 which might be consulted. D'Avenant's *Love and Honor* and *The Siege of Rhodes* (" Belles Lettres ") should be read. A selection of Dryden's plays appears in the " Mermaid " series, and *All for Love* and *The Spanish Fryar* have been edited by Professor Strunk in the " Belles Lettres " collection. Etherege has been edited by Verity ; Wycherley, Congreve, and Vanbrugh are in the " Mermaid " series ; Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem* and *The Recruiting Officer* in the " Belles Lettres " edition. The selection of Shadwell's plays in the " Mermaid " series should be read, and, if possible, some of the cruder heroic dramas (e.g., those of Settle). There are, however, few reprints of minor Restoration dramas. Otway's *The Orphan* and *Venice Preserv'd* (" Belles

<sup>1</sup> Middleton's *The Witch* is also interesting as a crude example of this type, and the witches are interesting when compared with the weird sisters of *Macbeth*.

## INTRODUCTION TO DRAMATIC THEORY

Lettres ") are exceedingly important, and Rowe's *The Fair Penitent* and *Jane Shore* (" Belles Lettres ") present interesting characteristics. Adaptations of Shakespeare also are worth studying. Some of these appear in the appendices to Furness' *Variorum* edition of Shakespeare ; others are given in Montague Summers' *Shakespeare Adaptations*. Odell's *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving* and the present writer's *Dryden as an Adapter of Shakespeare* (Oxford University Press, for the Shakespeare Association) might likewise be glanced at.

### (vii) EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Some of the writers mentioned above (e.g., Vanbrugh, Farquhar, and Rowe) really belong in date to this section. Eighteenth-century drama as a whole is poor. Lillo's *The London Merchant* and *Fatal Curiosity* (" Belles Lettres ") should be read, and along with them W. H. Hudson's admirable essay in *Quiet Hours in a Library*. Addison's *Cato* is the typical neo-classic tragedy, Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* one of the typical sentimental dramas, Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* the typical ballad opera. Moore's *The Gamester* is a readable domestic tragedy. Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (" Belles Lettres ") and Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* represent the revival of the comedy of manners. For this period *The British Theatre*, a series of plays collected by Mrs Inchbald and published in 1808, will be found invaluable. It is still fairly easily procured second-hand.

### (viii) ROMANTIC

Nearly all the poets of the early nineteenth century attempted drama. Shelley's *The Cenci* (" Belles Lettres ") is the finest ; but Coleridge's *Remorse* and Byron's *Cain*, *The Two Foscari*, and *Werner*, as well as some of Browning's plays, should be read. The ordinary acting drama is not of high standard.

### (ix) MODERN

No more than a bare selection can here be given. Robertson's *Society and Caste* (" Belles Lettres ") are late nineteenth-century acting plays. Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *The Importance of being Earnest* show a new revival of the comedy of wit. The plays of Pinero and of H. A. Jones reach a higher standard than was attained by the acting drama in the earlier period. Masfield's *The Tragedy of Nan* is an interesting domestic tragedy. Barrie,

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Shaw, and Galsworthy all display the tendencies of modern theatrical productivity.

### (D) FRENCH DRAMA

It is impossible here to present so full a list of French plays as has been given of English. There are many histories of French literature; of these that of Petit de Julleville is the most thorough. Gaiffe's work on *Le Drame* is an interesting and detailed history of that particular species of sentimental drama which dominated Europe in the eighteenth century. Some of Racine should be read, for preference *Andromaque*, *Phèdre* (Heath), and *Bérénice*. Molière, of course, is of tremendous importance, not only intrinsically, but for his influence on English comedy after 1660. A selection of his plays is issued by Heath; there is an edition of the *Œuvres Complètes* by the Oxford University Press; and John Grant of Edinburgh has a full edition with French on one page and translation (by A. R. Waller) on the other. There are many biographies of Molière. The most complete in English is that of Chatfield Taylor. Something of eighteenth-century French drama should be read (*e.g.*, Diderot), and full attention should be paid to the revival of romance after the famous production of *Hernani*. There are many 'problem' plays in modern French literature, such as those of Sardou, plays that take their rise from the Ibsen movement, but present interesting variations. Maeterlinck is exceedingly important. *Pelléas et Mélisande* has been issued in translation in the "Scott" Library, and there are English renderings of most of his other works.

### (E) ITALIAN AND SPANISH DRAMA

Some of Calderon's plays have been excellently translated by Fitzgerald and deserve reading for their peculiar romantic atmosphere. Goldoni's work is vast, and only a very few of his comedies have been rendered into English. There is a beautifully printed selection with designs by Lovat Fraser recently published by Cecil Palmer. Other plays may be found in a collection of *Masterpieces of Foreign Authors* (1890). Alfieri is certainly the greatest tragic poet of Italy. His dramas have been translated into English and published in the Bohn Library.

Some modern Italian plays, such as the earlier dramas of D'Annunzio, repay close analytical study.

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## (F) GERMAN AND SCANDINAVIAN DRAMA

For the sentimental and domestic drama of Germany Kotzebue (frequently translated in the early nineteenth century) should be read. Schiller, Lessing, and Goethe are of great importance, and, later, Hauptmann. The standard translation of Ibsen's works is that of William Archer.

On Ibsen and Björnson see the illuminating essays by Brandes, edited by William Archer.



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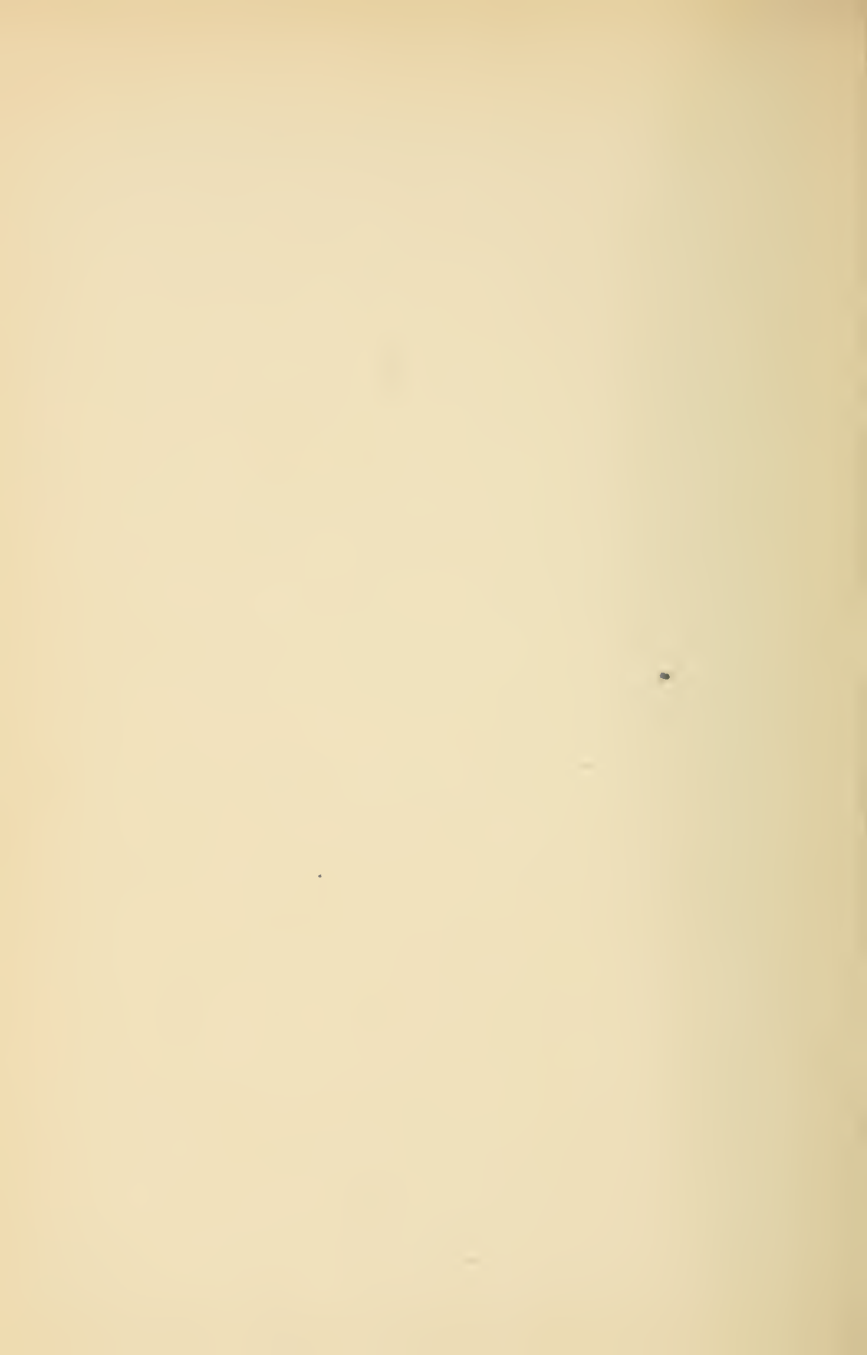
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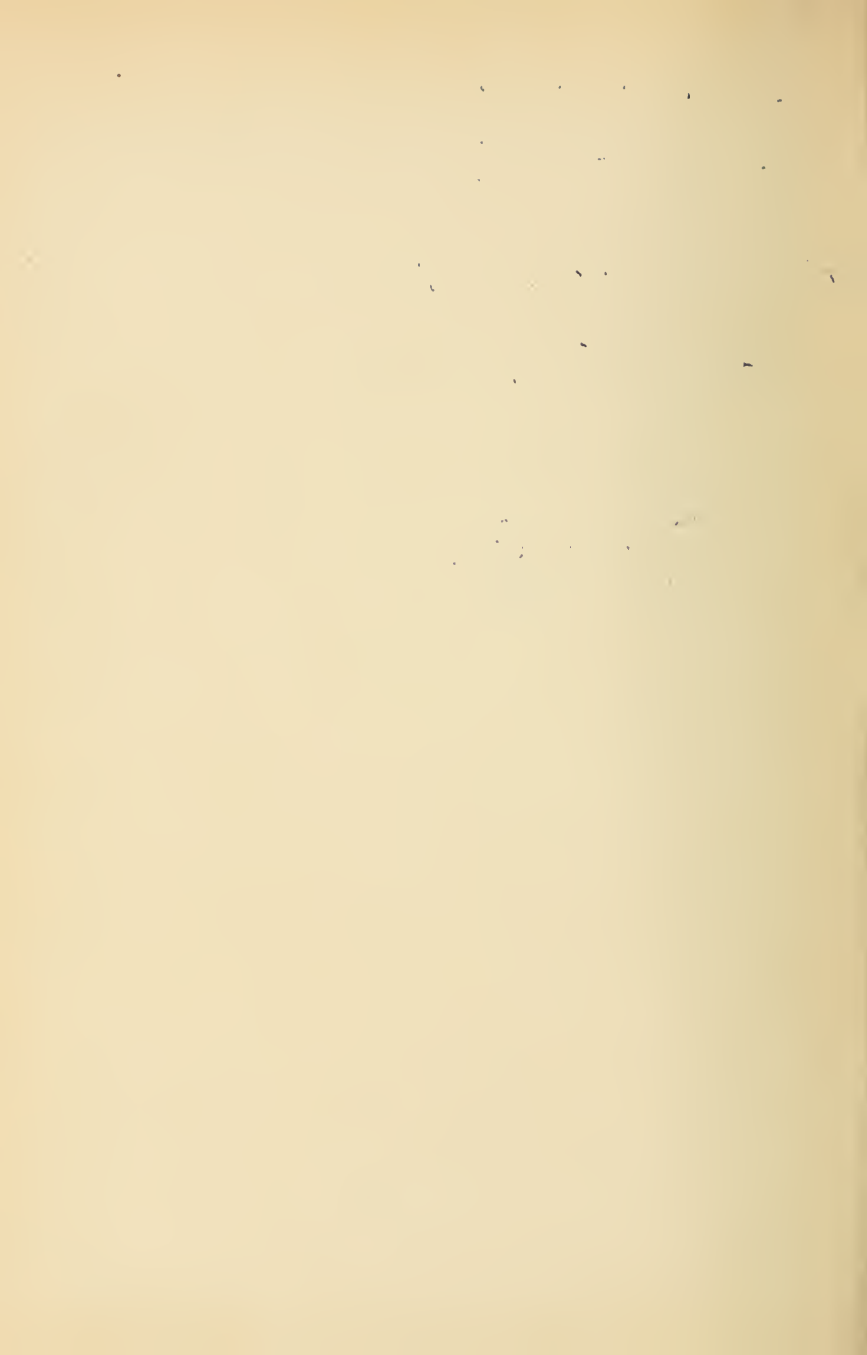
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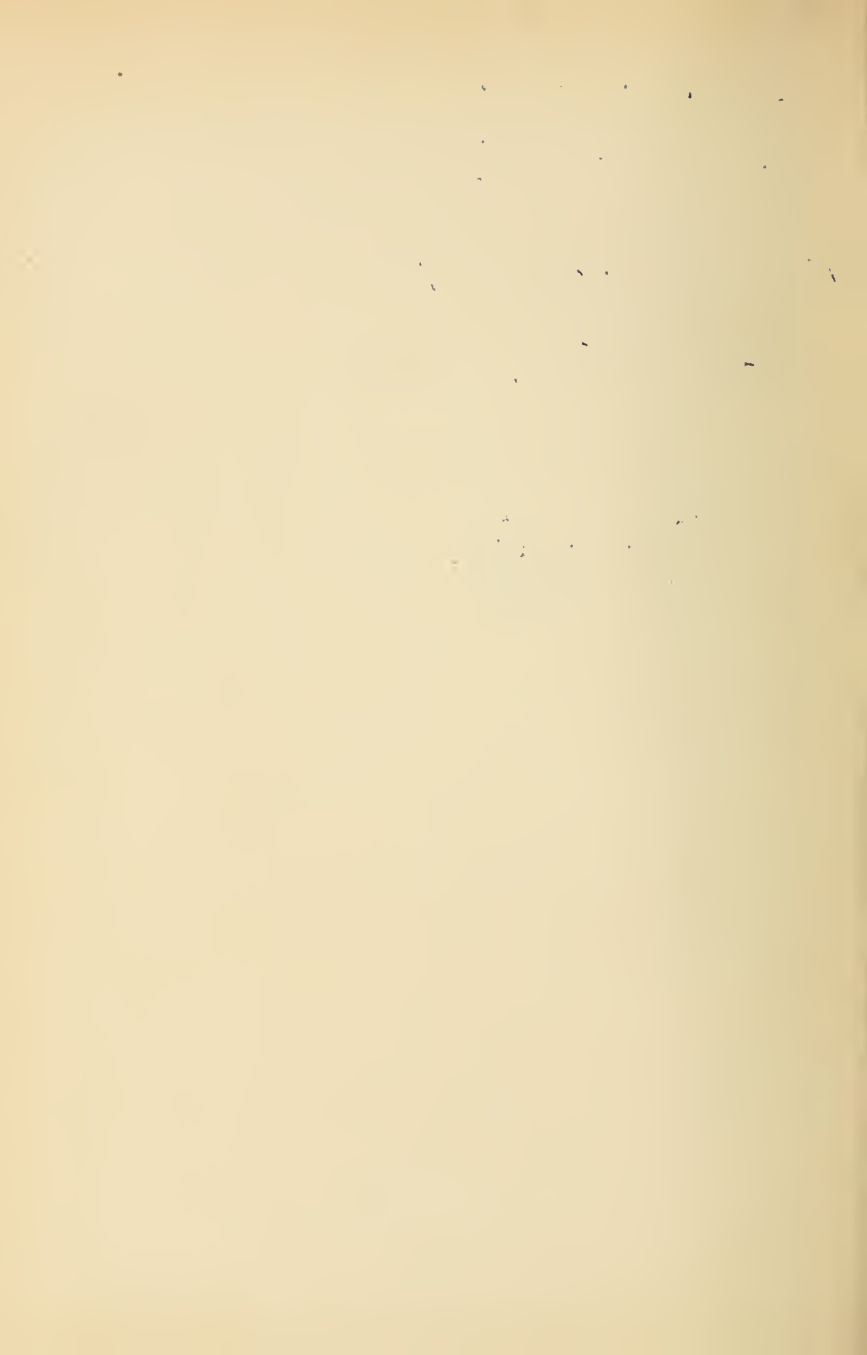
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